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ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AT SECOND CLASS MAIL RATES.

Vol. XXXIX.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., May 9, 1888.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

No. 498



THE ROBBERS RECOILED IN DISMAY. IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CAR STOOD CENTRAL PACIFIC PAUL AND THE DOG.

OR,

Yank Yellowbird's Iron Trail.

BY WM. H. MANNING,
AUTHOR OF "WILD WEST WALT," "YANK YELLOWBIRD," "GLADIATOR GABE," "THE DUKE OF DAKOTA," "GOLD GAUNTLET," "HOT HEART," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE BRINK OF SUICIDE.

A TRAIN was moving rapidly along the Central Pacific Railroad, its course being toward the west. Night was near at hand, and the smoke from the engine floated back, hanging low, to mix with the shadows which were gathering in the gulches.

To an imaginative person the most interesting part of the Overland journey was at hand, for they were entering a region where the country was mountainous and wild, and no one could say what an hour would bring forth. There were wild and lawless men there, and train-wreckers had been heard of before then.

Into this area of doubt, darkness and danger

the train and its human freight was going with a rush and a roar.

A tall, impressive-looking man was walking through one of the cars, but he stopped short at sight of a certain woman. She occupied one of the seats alone, and, looking out of the window, seemed unconscious of everything around her, but she started when he sat down beside her. He evidently tried to so conduct himself as not to attract the attention of others, but his eyes had an angry sparkle as he turned them again upon her.

"What are you doing in this car?" he demanded.

"Thinking!" was her brief, curt reply.

"Your place is in the other car."

"Mr. Arlington said that I could go away."

"More fool he! Even if he did, what is your object?"

"I wanted to be alone; I should have died had I stayed there!" was her quick, vehement response. "I could not breathe; I was suffocating; I had to leave. There is a limit even to my endurance."

"Humph! And what, pray, was suffocating you?"

"The perdition within my own mind."

"So you acknowledge your sins?"

"How can I help it when I think of Leonice Ross? She is young, beautiful, happy and charming. Her life has thus far been free from what is evil and bitter—would to heaven it could remain so! Her own mother could not wish her better than I do, yet I am lending myself to your evil plot, and aiding to lure her on to her doom. It was thoughts of that; of her helpless condition and my infamy; that made me go almost mad in the other car, and long to get away—to be alone; to think!"

She turned a pair of great black eyes upon him, and they had the mingled fierceness of a panther's and the despair of a lost soul.

He shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Don't be violent, Madam Pulaski," he advised.

"Do you know what is in my mind?"

"No."

"If you were Leonice's only enemy I would shoot you where you sit."

"You are kind, Madam."

"I am desperate."

"And foolish."

"Sueer on, James Whiting; you and Arlington have me in your power. In your power! Only for that I would not raise a hand to help you; and you may yet find that hand turned against you. I am risking my soul by aiding in your infamous plot against Leonice—what more can I do if I take justice in my own hands and end your unscrupulous life?"

He turned his face more fully toward her.

"Madam," he coldly enunciated, "you must curb that temper of yours. I command you not to use threats of turning against us; not even to think of it. Remember, I hold your fate, and another's, in the hollow of my hand!"

The imperious woman became weak as a child. She shivered, and shrunk back in the seat.

"I remember!" she gasped.

"Are you likely to forget again?"

"No."

She whispered the word. All the fire had gone from her eyes, but the look of the lost soul remained and reigned supreme. Utter misery was expressed on her face.

There was momentary silence, during which the man mechanically toyed with his watch-chain. He was a man of about fifty years, tall and of good figure, but his face was cold, stern and hard. His name was Whiting, and he had once been a minor judge in an Eastern State.

Madam Pulaski—or "Madam," as she was frequently called, without any addition—looked to be thirty years of age. She was of medium height, with a well-rounded form which seemed to lack nothing of perfection, and a face which was grand in its regal beauty. Every feature was rarely perfect in line and curve, and an artist might have gone into raptures at the prospect of such a model. It was a strong, resolute face for one of her sex, though there were times when all its strength was swept away. Suffering, bitter and protracted, she had known, but the only trace left upon that wonderful face was an undefinable one which simply said, "This woman has a history." She was a brunette, with abundant black hair and great, dusky eyes.

She suddenly turned to Whiting.

"I will go back to the other car," she simply said.

"Are you yourself again?"

"Yes."

"And you will betray nothing to Leonice?"

"I will not."

"Very well, then. Go, and I will join you directly."

He made way for her to pass out and then resumed his seat, but as his gaze followed her a shade of suspicion passed over his face.

"She is treacherous as Judas," he muttered, "and it would be just like her to betray all to Leonice. I will not trust her."

He arose and walked after her.

She had closed the door behind her; he opened

it quickly and stepped out upon the platform. She had not had time to reach her seat in the next car, yet he did not at once see her. Another moment, and he saw that which, hard-natured man that he was, sent a chill to his blood. Madam Pulaski stood upon the lower step, and was poised herself for a leap from the fast-moving train.

"Heaven have mercy upon me, a sinner!" he heard her cry, and then she relaxed her hold of the rail.

Another moment would have sealed her fate, but he threw off the stupor of horror which was upon him, sprang forward and grasped her arm. He was barely in time, and for a moment it looked as though both would fall, but he summoned all his strength and dragged her back to the safer part of the platform.

"Mad woman!" he exclaimed, "what would you do?"

She turned her great eyes upon him mechanically; they looked dull and far-away. She made no reply.

"I say, what would you do?" he repeated.

"I would end my wretched life!" she stolidly answered.

"Mad! mad!"

Her eyes lighted up; the color swept back to her cheeks.

"Who drove me to it?" she demanded.

"Come, now, this won't do," he urged, still too much startled and amazed to be severe.

"What will do better for me?"

"You forget—"

He lowered his voice to a whisper and uttered the rest of the sentence in her ear. A frightened look crossed her face.

"I had forgotten!" she exclaimed. "Merciful Heaven! what was I about to do? I was mad, indeed!"

"Live; you must live!"

"The advice is selfish, yet I thank you. Strange that I should owe you good will, James Whiting! Live? Surely I will—I must."

"Promise me," the judge earnestly said, "that this attempt shall not be repeated. Promise me not to attempt your life again."

"I promise."

"Will you swear it?"

"I will—I do."

"Enough! I know that you are a conscientious woman, Madam Pulaski. Go back to Leonice, and I will follow in a moment. Don't betray emotion to the girl."

Madam entered the car. Her adventure had not deprived her of any physical strength, and it had served one good purpose. The danger through which she had passed had served, oddly enough, to drive away the mental gloom which had so lately depressed her, and for the time she was calm and clear-minded.

She went directly to a seat where a young lady sat alone. The latter looked up and welcomed Madam with a bright smile.

"I had begun to think you were lost," she said.

"I fell into conversation," Madam composedly replied, as she sat down by the side of the girl.

"I wish I could make friends as you do, but I don't dare, and I'm afraid I couldn't if I would."

"You lose nothing."

"Even casual acquaintances serve to pass the time on such a long journey as this."

"Casual acquaintances are not always safe."

"Sage advice, Madam Pulaski, but I am afraid I lack your strong mind and good judgment. Do you know"—here she lowered her voice, glanced back at the young man who occupied a seat back of them, and smiled—"that I have been looking all around at the other passengers, studying them and wondering what ones I would like, and whom I would not like."

Madam Pulaski looked into the bright young face with a smile. There were times when Leonice Ross made her forget her own sorrows, for the girl drew her toward her by cords of love.

Leonice presented a strong contrast to Madam. Leonice was young, and her battle with the world was not fully begun. The real world was as little known to her as it is to all who live quiet, peaceful lives, and the blighting hand of trouble had not been laid upon her heart. Her life had known two sorrows: the vain wish that the mother who died in the daughter's infancy had lived to share her daily life, and the death of a father who, with the kindest of feelings in his heart, had practically exiled himself from her. She had grieved for him, but the misery and desolation that accompany heart-rending trouble she had not met.

She was a brown-haired girl, with rosy cheeks; a frank, bright smile, and the inexperience of a child.

"Did our neighbors average well?" asked Madam.

"Some of them did not. Do you see the man next to the window, in the fifth seat ahead?"

Madam looked. She saw a man with immense breadth of shoulders, coal-black hair, a big hat of Western style, and ill-fitting clothes. Just then he turned his head, and she saw more—a coarse, swarthy face, black beard, small eyes and singularly heavy brows.

"I don't like him!" declared Leonice, with a shiver.

"Nor I. His face is not a good one."

"Now, look across the car, four seats forward. Do you see the man in the funny cap, made of some animal's skin, with all the fur on it?"

"Yes."

"I like him. He is dreadfully homely, but his face is good and kind."

The man in the fur cap proved as obliging as he of the black beard; he turned his head at that moment. Madam Pulaski saw a quaint, good-humored, homely face. The man's nose was too large; his eyes were too small; his mouth was too wide, and his beard too sparse for good looks; but as he spoke to his companion in the seat the homely face lighted up with a frank, good-humored, whimsical smile.

"Once more I commend your judgment. The man looks like an honest, old-time borderman. But what of the young man at his elbow?"

"Nonsense!" said Leonice, turning her head; "I am no judge of young men."

"We shall have to admit that this particular young man is a strong, bold, self-reliant-looking gentleman, and there we will drop him."

This conversation had been carried on in low tones. Judge Whiting had come in and sat down in the seat behind them—by the side of the Heber Arlington before mentioned—and neither lady cared to have him overhear anything. Unknown to Leonice, they were the same as prisoners, and Whiting and Arlington, nominally friends, were really their jailers. Unfortunate Leonice! she little suspected what fate had in store for her!

CHAPTER II.

TROUBLE AHEAD.

THE train rushed on with a rattle, a roar and a shriek. The country grew wilder, and grim, broken ridges and gulches appeared by the way. The darkness increased until it lacked but a little of night, and into the dark expanse flashed the train. The Central Pacific sees many dramas along its course, and this trip was not destined to be deficient in that respect.

The black-bearded man arose and walked back through the car with a slouching gait. He did not look more prepossessing when on his feet. He had a splendid physical development; his face was fairly intelligent and, from one point of view, he was not ill-looking. It was a face, however, where lawless passions were plainly revealed, and a timid person would not have cared to keep his company. Pride of strength, or something else, gave him a resolute air like that of one who is accustomed to obedience. Thus might an Italian bandit act and move.

He passed on to the next car.

Two rough-looking fellows sat together there. They had appropriated two seats, and no one saw fit to keep them company. The room was not needed, and might not have been asked for if it had been; the men were more lawless looking, more brutal, and far less intelligent than he of the black beard.

He sat down beside one of the pair.

"How goes it, Jake Blade?" he asked.

"All right hyar, Cap."

"No sign o' suspicion?"

"Not a sign."

"We are getting on."

"So I see."

"If anything, we are ahead of time, I do believe. I'm afraid we'll reach the place too soon."

"Sooner reached, sooner over."

"That ain't it. I had planned ter hev everybody asleep, an' I do think we're runnin' ahead o' time. Ef we get thar ahead, so much the worse for us. Wide-awake passengers ain't so easy to go through as dumfounded, sleepy ones."

"I reckon we'll come out all right. It ain't the way o' Garrett Jeffreys ter fail."

"Don't speak my name, Blade; you might as well git up an' tell 'em all that we're train-wreckers. Them who travel much over the Central Pacific have heard o' Garrett Jeffreys."

The man's pride showed again. Whoever he was, he felt that it was an honor to be Garrett Jeffreys.

"I should reckon so," agreed Blade. "Did the conductor take pertic'ler notice on ye, Cap?"

"No."

"Nor o' me an' Dan Hopper."

"I know him!" muttered the second rough, in a growl. "Luther Peters is his name, an' he chucked me off his train once. He said I hadn't paid my fare—which were a fact. But I'll be even with him ter-night; or my name ain't Hopper."

"Ef the boyees don't fail ter tear up the track," put in Blade.

"Let 'em fail, an' I'll make buzzard meat of them!" declared Jeffreys. "Thar is rich plunder on this train."

"An' fair women," added Blade.

"They won't be pooty when the train goes ter smash," growled Hopper.

"I hope we don't git smashed," muttered Blade. "Say, Cap, I like the old way best; none o' the boys on board, an' let the engine run on ter the barricade at full speed."

"I know my business," stiffly declared Jeffreys. "By this plan I know just what the rich hauls be, an' we'll run less risk. As for us three, we'll get in the rear car, as I've told ye before, when ten miles this side o' the place o' wreck. I'll jerk the bell in time to slack them up a bit, and even ef we don't jump off, we'll skeerfully feel the shock in the rear car."

Blade shook his head and replied:

"The plan is bold an' hearty, like all yer doin's, Cap, but ef Jake Blade is killed in the smash-up I'll never forgive myself."

"Bah!" returned Hopper; "don't let your mind run on sech subjicks. Think o' the plunder—the money, jewels, watches an' the like—"

"That'll do," interrupted Jeffreys. "Don't proclaim our biz to the whole crowd."

"What's the time, Cap?"

Jeffreys held up a ponderous silver watch.

"Three hours afore the smash-up."

"Be you sure you're right?"

"I'll see."

The conductor, a stout, resolute-looking man, was passing through the car. Jeffreys stopped him.

"Excuse me, sir," he politely said, "but how's the time?"

The conductor drew out his watch, answered briefly and went on. Jake Blade looked admiringly at his chief.

"You've got the nerve, Cap! What ef he'd recognized you as Garrett Jeffreys, the train-wrecker?"

"In that case, Lute Peters an' I would hev had a skirmish, I reckon. Wal, lads, I'll leave ye now. You kin go ter the rear car whenever ye see fit, but I sha'n't do so until we're close on ter the place o' wreck. Keep cool, an' don't git inter any row."

The speaker walked away.

"He's a good 'un!" muttered Hopper.

"He's a dare-devil, an' he's brought us on a dare-devil trip. Jeffreys is a good man, but I wish I was at the camp this minute, lookin' at his da'rter's pooty face. Fack is, Dan, Ursula has made a commotion under my top ribs."

"Bah! she wouldn't look at you."

"She does, an' she talks to me, too; an' when she talks, wasps an' razors ain't nowhar. Wah! ef I had that gal's gift o' speech I'd hire out ter drill rocks with sharp words."

"Rocks ain't so easy drilled as you be, Jake Blade, an' ef you fool around Ursula you must expect ter git hurt. She don't care a rap fur one o' the boyees, an' sassy ain't no name fur her! That's natur'. She's a woman. A woman can't send her fist out from the shoulder, nor wrastle wal, nor lift a forty-gallon bar'l o' whisky—unless they do it a pint at a time—nor throw a stone; so they work off all their venom with their tongue. That's natur'!"

The ill-dressed philosopher settled back further in the seat, while Blade looked at him with the admiration which men pay to genius.

In the meanwhile Garrett Jeffreys had returned to the other car. It was his policy not to attract attention, but as he passed forward, Leonice Ross chanced to look up and their eyes met. Jeffreys stopped short. A startled expression appeared in Leonice's face. Then the man recovered his wits and slouched onto his seat.

But he did not forget Leonice.

In the meanwhile Judge Whiting had come to the conclusion that Madam Pulaski was to be trusted; that she did not intend to betray him to Leonice. He had been talking with Arlington, but, having due respect for Madam's acute hearing, had not ventured to tell of her attempted suicide. It was necessary to tell this, however, for the fact that she was in such a desperate mood, complicated the situation, and called for extra watchfulness on their part to insure the success of their iniquitous plot against Leonice.

He gave Arlington a private signal, and they arose and left the car together.

Madam smiled sarcastically; she knew how to account for their retirement.

"Do you know," said Leonice, "I find this journey very different from what I had expected. I dreaded it, but it is really pleasant. How could it be otherwise with such kind friends as you, Mr. Arlington and the judge?"

Madam's heart sunk. There were times when Leonice's lack of perception almost maddened her. Why was the girl so blind that she could not see what Whiting and Arlington were? She asked herself the question many times. There were several answers. Whiting and Arlington were plausible-appearing men; the former had been her father's friend; and one cannot read human nature when twenty years of age as one can ten years later. All very good reasons, yet Madam could not see, even then, how Leonice could be so utterly deceived.

"Heaven help her!" was the way the unhappy woman unusually ended her meditations; "I am doing my part to lure her on—on to her doom. Was there ever before such a wretch as I!"

Whatever she was, it was not strange that Leonice was being deceived and decoyed to her fate.

Madam managed to make a quiet reply to the girl's last question, but she was nervous and ill

at ease. Handling her handkerchief in this mood she dropped it, and it fell in the passage. At that moment a gentleman was walking through the car, and the handkerchief fell almost at his feet. He stopped, picked it up and extended it to Madam with a bow and a smile.

Their eyes met—then the smile faded from his face. He recoiled; Madam Pulaski shrunk back as though from a blow. Both had grown strangely pale; both were plainly startled and amazed. Neither spoke; in silence the pale faced pair gazed at each other.

Leonice had noticed the man's emotion first, and as she turned her regard upon her companion she was astonished at the terror and dismay exhibited by Madam.

What did it mean?

The tableau was broken. The man recovered his presence of mind; a cold, contemptuous expression succeeded his emotion; and then, without a word or a bow, he resumed his progress through the car.

Leonice mechanically watched him for a moment, and then looked back at her companion. Madam was as pale as ever, and she trembled as though with ague. The fluttering of her hands was something painful to see.

"Did he frighten you?" asked Leonice, wonderingly.

"Yes."

It was only a husky whisper.

"What did he do?"

"Nothing—now."

"Oh! you know him, then?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"Hubert Vaughan."

"Is he your enemy?"

Madam suddenly started up.

"What did I say?" she asked, nervously.

"You said that you knew him; that his name was Hubert Vaughan. Where did you know him? Why are you so afraid of him?"

Madam passed her hand quickly across her face.

"I am not afraid of him," she answered. "I was only startled and surprised; I did not expect to meet him here. It was only the shock of seeing him. Afraid of him? No! No worthy person need be afraid of Hubert Vaughan."

Leonice had a vein of romance in her nature, and she at once wove a web of dramatic events supposed to have taken place in the past.

"Won't you tell me about him?" she asked.

"No, no! don't ask it; don't mention him again. Never speak his name again, and, when he returns, don't for heaven's sake, let him see you look at him!"

The girl was silenced. There was that in Madam Pulaski's face which awed her. If ever human face told of keen mental suffering, hers did then, and it was all the more surprising to Leonice because she had been accustomed to see Madam only as a firm, composed, gracious woman.

The change to what she now was was remarkable.

Leonice sunk back in the seat and said no more. She dared not. When she looked at the pale, trembling, suffering creature beside her she lacked the resolution to so much as stir.

In the meanwhile the cause of this emotion had gone into the next car. Whiting and Arlington were there, and in another part of the car were Blade and Hopper, but there was no acquaintance between either pair, nor did Vaughan know any of them. He dropped into a vacant seat.

His face had not resumed its natural color, and it may be that he was little less moved than Madam Pulaski. He showed his emotion less, for he had a man's strong will, but the encounter had startled and shaken him greatly.

He had sat down to think, and he employed the next five minutes in that way. Then he reached a decision. He stopped a passing brakeman.

"Do you remember a man in the next car who wears a fur cap?"

"Yes."

"I want to see the man who sits beside him. Please tell the gentleman to come to this car, and do it as quietly as possible. I think he will readily obey."

CHAPTER III.

THE OVERLAND DETECTIVE.

VAUGHAN pressed a coin into the brakeman's hand, and that person readily agreed to do the errand. He went on his way, while Vaughan settled back again. Just then there was a fierce dash of rain against the window. He did not wonder at it, for he had observed before darkness fell that black clouds were piling up against the sky, but the beginning of the down-pour was singularly sudden and violent.

"It's going to be a bad night," said a man in the seat behind him.

"Right you are," a second voice answered.

"I'm glad were safe under cover."

"Be you sure we are safe?"

"Ain't we!"

"Not in these hills. I know them well, and if it pours like this for half an hour we shall not

be safe. There never was a place where torrents formed more quickly. The land is made up of gulches, and very steep ridges, and as a result, all the water that falls is quickly sent into the gulches; and there it forms into rivers and goes sweeping along resistlessly. This is the most dangerous stretch on the road, owing to wash-outs. Probably we are all right, but if the rain comes down like this a great while you will see the engineer slacken speed a good bit."

Vaughan forgot to listen further as the man for whom he had sent entered the car. He made a motion and the new-comer advanced.

"I am the one who sent for you," Vaughan announced.

The second man sat down.

"I am at your service," he replied courteously.

There was a resemblance between the men who now spoke together for the first time. Both were young, comparatively speaking, Vaughan being about thirty-one and his companion five years younger; both were strong, hardy-looking men; both were well dressed and had the appearance of gentlemen; and both had frank, bold and manly faces. Vaughan, however, was less of the brunette style than the other, and his look was that of one from the East, while his neighbor had upon his face the brown hue which sun, wind and health give the Western rover.

"I hope you will excuse me," pursued Vaughan, "but I wish to speak upon a delicate subject."

"Pray go on."

"First, I know who you are."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. While I was waiting at the depot for our train I noticed you, and some unknown man volunteered to tell me your name. He said you were Central Pacific Paul, the Overland railroad detective, otherwise Mr. Ballard. Your name was not new to me."

"Well?" quietly questioned Ballard.

"It is because you are he that I now address you. Report says that you pass much of your time riding over the Central Pacific, on watch for rascals and crimes. Now, sir, my name is Vaughan, and I am from New York; this is the introduction, and I will now, with your permission, come to the point."

"I am listening."

Mr. Ballard's voice and manner were equally calm. He impressed one as being a strong-minded, clear-headed man who would weigh every circumstance well before acting decisively, and not likely to make many mistakes.

"Have you noticed any of your fellow-passengers in the next car?"

"All!"

"Do you, then, remember a girl of about twenty, and a woman ten years older, who occupy a seat on the left of the car, a little back of where you sat? Two men who sit back of them are of the same party."

"I remember them."

"Do you know any of the quartette?"

"One, only."

"Which one?"

"The younger man."

"Who is he? What is he?"

"Pardon me, but, before you go further, I desire to know the object of your inquiries," answered Central Pacific Paul, frankly.

"I will tell you," Vaughan explained. "Some time ago I noticed three of the party; all except the elder woman. Of the other three I decided that they might be a father and his two children. The girl, I saw, was very lovely—a most charming young lady. Pardon me, Mr. Ballard, I am not in love with her; I am not in love with any woman, for which, heaven be praised. This girl, however, held my attention. She looked like one little used to the world, and ignorant of its miseries, delusions and snares; ignorant of all things worse than the little misdemeanors of life. Such was my opinion until I walked this way through the car—then I saw the face of the second woman."

His voice trembled a little, and he came to a stop. The Overland detective waited quietly for him to resume.

"The second woman was no stranger to me, Mr. Ballard; I had known her well in the past. More than that, I knew her to be a false, treacherous, hypocritical, evil woman. Now, sir, you see why I have called you. Knowing what the elder woman is, I ask if she is a safe companion for the younger one; and that, too, is why I asked if you knew any of the party. I doubt the men. Who are they?"

"One moment more," replied Ballard. "Who is the elder woman?"

"I don't know her present name."

"What was the name by which you knew her?"

"Margaret."

"And her last name—her surname?"

Vaughan had been answering reluctantly. He now rebelled outright.

"You will have to excuse me, sir. That part of my life in which she figured was too painful to be related now. Bear in mind that I am not making any charge against the woman—indeed, I would not bear witness against her under any circumstances. I do not aim to injure her, but

to protect the young girl. I fear the latter has fallen into bad company, and I would save her."

"Haven't you let your imagination have free rein while surmising her situation?"

"I dare say I have. I have no proof that she is being made the victim of unscrupulous persons, yet I feel that it may be so."

"Possibly your idea is correct. The young man of the party whom I know is Blonde Pete, a blackleg and gambler. Just now he calls himself Heber Arlington."

"Ah! don't this confirm my theory?"

"It confirms, but does not prove it."

"Isn't there enough grounds to interfere?"

"What can I do?"

"Find out if the young girl is being decoyed away."

"How shall I do it?"

"I confess that I don't know, but you are a detective—"

"A detective is only a man. He has the law back of him, but if he abuses his power, he is not worthy his office. I can watch the quartette, and that is all I can do. You make no specific charge against the woman you call Margaret, and I know of nothing for which I can arrest Arlington. The elder man is unknown to us; he may be a saint or a sinner. The same remark will apply to the young girl. She is beautiful, and she may be as good as she looks—or she may be as bad as Arlington. Appearances are deceptive. While I appreciate your suggestion, Mr. Vaughan, I can promise only one thing—I will watch them."

There was a brief silence between them, but noise enough outside. The rain was descending in torrents, and beating furiously against the window.

"Your decision is the only way open to you," Vaughan finally confessed. "We can't molest these persons without some proof, and that we have not got."

"If they go far, something may occur before the end of the journey. By the way, I wish you would give me the history of that elder woman. Is she such a desperate character? Is she an Eastern criminal?"

Vaughan set his teeth tightly.

"Let me be just," he said, after another pause. "I owe her anything but good-will, for she has injured me infamously, but I cannot name one thing for which the law could touch her, nor that you would consider proof that she was an evil-doer. In such a case I must be just and admit it. All I can do is to say that she did all she could to ruin me, and I feel sure she would not hesitate to do as much against the young girl; she is utterly unscrupulous."

The detective did not answer at once. He sat turning what he had heard over in his mind. Vaughan watched to see what impression he had made, while the rain drove wildly against the window.

"I'll keep your warning in mind," finally responded Ballard, "and I may be able to learn more about the parties. Certainly, Heber Arlington is not a man whom any stretch of imagination can make into a decent person. I'll watch all of them."

He arose partially, and then glanced toward the black expanse outside the car.

"A wild night," observed Vaughan.

"I hope it will be no more."

"What do you mean?"

"Riding on a train is not safe when rain is falling like this; there is danger of a wash-out, and that may result in a very bad accident. Don't mention it, however."

He left the car, while Jake Blade and Dan Hopper looked after him in a way anything but friendly.

"I say, do ye s'pose his nibs got onter us?" asked Dan.

"Never looked this way."

"Don't be so sure o' that. You never kin ketch lightnin' lookin' at ye, but the way it hits shows its sized up the sitivation in advance. Same o' Central Pacific Paul. He's a bad man, he is, an' our band ain't got a wuss enemy."

"We may not hev him by mornin'. He's in a car wal ahead, an' when the wreck comes, it may be good-by, Mr. Sneak Detective."

"Fack, an' it may be bullo, detective, an' good-by, train-wreckers," and Mr. Hopper shut one eye and nodded suggestively at the lamp overhead.

Vaughan remained motionless and thoughtful. The detective had convinced him, and he tried to banish the matter from his mind, something more easily tried than done. The face of Margaret Pulaski seemed ever before his eyes. Her unexpected appearance had disturbed the calm current of his life, and had brought back thoughts which were bitter and painful.

"Who would have thought of seeing her here?" he muttered, as he looked toward, rather than out of the window against which the rain still beat furiously.

The men in the seat behind him began to talk loudly, and, irritated even by this trifle, he arose to change his place. He would not go back to the car where Madam Pulaski was, so he found a deserted area back of the noisy men, and beyond the sound of their voices, and sat

down to humor the mood which was upon him. He soon forgot all that was transpiring around him, and was only recalled to present life when a sudden increase of conversation about him, and the efforts of nearly every one to look out of the window, showed him that there was something unusual transpiring. The conversation soon revealed what it was. The train was running at very slow speed, and it was understood by all that the cause lay in the state of the weather.

The railroad men were afraid of a wash-out, and if the train ran into one at full speed, it meant death to scores of persons.

This caution was commended by nearly all who knew the dangers of the hills. There were two exceptions. Jake Blade and Dan Hopper looked disgusted and angry.

Vaughan determined to return to his place in the other car. He went at once, but studiously avoided even a glance toward where he had seen Madam Pulaski and her companions. He reached the seat he had before occupied, and took his old place.

His companion, who had been anxious to make an acquaintance on the road, welcomed him back with a weak smile and equally weak words, both of which were characteristic of the man.

Vaughan saw that there had been a change of occupants in the seat ahead, but he made a sudden start as he recognized them.

They were Madam Pulaski and Leonice.

CHAPTER IV.

AN OMINOUS COLLISION.

VAUGHAN'S first feeling was one of indignation, and he was about to leave his seat, believing that Madam Pulaski had deliberately taken the place to annoy him, but pride came to his aid and he would not stir. He glanced back. Judge Whiting and Heber Arlington were next to him. His gaze wandered to where the quartette had before been. There he saw that two men who had been drinking heavily were acting boisterously.

This was the real reason for the change of seats, though Vaughan was not ready to admit that he saw reason to believe it.

If Madam Pulaski was conscious of his return she did not betray the fact by look or motion. She and Leonice were silent, though Whiting and Arlington were talking busily.

Vaughan's nearest neighbor was in a sociable mood. He was a young Eastern man with a weak face, weak eyes and weak body; yellow hair, a barely-visible mustache, a single eyeglass and the dress of a dandy. He rejoiced in the name of Van T. Stuyvesant Bliss, and he had a mission in the West. He now tried to resume conversation, but Vaughan would not talk.

The latter lay back on the cushions and encouraged the belligerent mood that was stirring within him. He had a strong desire to make trouble for the companions of the fair-faced girl in front of him. How could he do it? Vaughan had all the instincts of a gentleman, but he believed that Leonice was in the hands of sharpers, if not villains. If he could baffle their plans he would be glad to do it. His talk with Central Pacific Paul had shown him that open exposure was not likely to be successful, but could he not warn Leonice?

He determined to try.

After some meditation he produced his notebook and pencil, and wrote these lines upon one page:

"Pardon the interference of a stranger, but the writer is of the opinion that you may not know the real character of your traveling companions. 'Heber Arlington' is only an assumed name of 'Blonde Pete,' a notorious gambler; and at least one of your other companions is a dangerous person. If you know their true character, the writer has no more to say; but if you do not know them well—take care that you are not lured into trouble!"

Tearing out this leaf, Vaughan folded it and watched his chance to drop it into Leonice's lap unseen. He wished to hide his share in the transaction even from her—simply because she would probably betray him in her surprise, and cause a scene—and he had four pairs of eyes to deceive.

Several minutes passed. Madam Pulaski, engaged in thought, seemed oblivious to all around her, and Leonice, Arlington and Whiting were looking out of the window at the storm.

The chance had come.

With a quick movement Vaughan dropped the note over the girl's shoulder, and it slid down and rested against her gloved hand. Only Van T. Stuyvesant Bliss had seen the act, and he misinterpreted it. Believing that a flirtation was begun, he turned his face toward his companion, with a smile which was sympathetic, and as much of the "beaming" order as the weak face would allow, but Vaughan scowled at him fiercely.

"Not a word!" commanded the young man, in a low tone.

Bliss and his smile subsided. He was not a brave man, and he held Vaughan in reverential awe. The latter waited to see the fate of his note, and he was not long kept in suspense.

Judge Whiting suddenly rose, walked forward to the second seat, and began to address some unimportant words to Leonice. The note still lay unnoticed against her hand. Vaughan waited with considerable anxiety. He was not afraid of the judge or Arlington in the least, but he did desire to avoid a scene.

Suddenly Whiting's gaze chanced to fall, and he saw the note. He was quick-witted; a flood of suspicion, born of his knowledge of his own guilt, rushed upon him. He reached forward and secured the note.

Vaughan at once saw that it was his intention to read it. It was in the young man's power to snatch it away, but as this would not prevent the dreaded "scene," he resolved to do nothing of the kind. He sat in stoical silence while the paper was unfolded. Whiting read the few lines almost at a glance, and then an angry, menacing, startled expression swept over his face.

His eyes assumed an unpleasant glare, and his gaze was at once directed toward Vaughan and Bliss. He readily surmised the circumstances under which the note had been written, and only sought to learn its author. Unfortunately for Van T. Stuyvesant Bliss, he at once blushed like a school-girl. He believed that it was a love letter, and, feeling guilty, he looked guilty, while the real culprit remained as calm as ever.

Whiting grew more terrible of aspect. Stepping back to Bliss, he glared at him fiercely.

"Sir," he said, in a low but fierce tone, "your letter is in my hands."

"I—I see it is!" gasped poor Mr. Bliss.

"You are a scoundrel, sir, and you shall answer to me for writing such an infamous letter."

"I didn't write it!" protested Bliss.

"You speak falsely, and your face betrays the fact. I am not an admirer of turbulent scenes, but am ever ready to punish a black-guard, and I call upon all good people to assist me. Only a scoundrel would write an insulting letter to a young lady!"

Whiting was using his wits while he talked. He felt sure that he had fastened upon the writer of the note, and, reading Bliss's weak, cowardly nature well, had no doubt of his ability to crush him and the warning contained in the note at one and the same time. The attention of many of the passengers had already been attracted. The judge knew how to gain their sympathy, and he determined to do it and have the culprit expelled from the car to where he could not gain speech with Leonice. And while the judge talked he was rolling the unlucky note in his hand. If at a later time it was wanted, he intended to have it missing.

His victorious career was checked as Hubert Vaughan calmly rose and deliberately said:

"Don't be too fast, sir. Mr. Bliss had nothing to do with the note. I was the writer!"

Madam Pulaski turned her gaze upon the speaker, changed color, and then shrunk back in a startled way.

Whiting's confident expression vanished. He saw in the bold, strong-faced man who confronted him a very different enemy from Bliss. Vaughan did not look like a man to be frightened, and the case grew correspondingly serious. The judge saw no way, though, except to go on as he had begun.

"Then it is with you I will deal!" he belligerently replied.

"Do so, if you wish."

"How dare you write a secret, anonymous letter to this young lady? Anonymous letters, sir, are the weapons of unscrupulous men and cowards."

"Do you mean to apply those terms to me?"

"I do. You may be a desperate man whose only religion is that of the revolver, but I do not fear you. Only a vile wretch will write an insolent letter to a lady. I know these good people will uphold me."

He waved his hand to such of the passengers as had gathered around them, and there was a murmur of approval. Leonice's pretty face, now flushed and embarrassed, appealed strongly to them, and they thought that by taking sides against Vaughan they were arraying themselves in her support.

"I don't ask for any one to uphold me, being quite able to fight my own battles," answered Vaughan, with cool contempt. "All I ask is that you will produce the note concerning which you make so much talk."

Whiting held out both hands. They were empty.

"Where is the note?" he asked.

"True enough—where is it? Of course you don't know."

"I must have dropped it."

"Very likely."

The judge began a search on the floor, in which he was aided by other passengers.

"Gentlemen," said Vaughan coolly, "you may as well save yourselves trouble. Our indignant friend has very good reasons for wishing the note to disappear. Plainly, he has destroyed it, so that it may not be read by any of you. If he desires, I will repeat orally all that I wrote."

"The note asked my ward, Miss Ross, to go

into the next car and meet the writer there," brazenly explained Whiting.

"It is false!" retorted Vaughan.

"Sir!" cried the judge.

"Spare yourself high tragedy. You are not so easily shocked as that. I repeat what I said."

"By my life, I am not going to submit to this!" almost shouted the elder man. "I am Judge James Whiting, and no unknown desperado and swindler can intimidate me."

"Shall I repeat what was in the note?" steadily asked Vaughan.

"I have told already."

"And told no word of truth. Gentlemen, our self-styled judge speaks falsely; I never wrote one word of what he has assumed to repeat. What I really wrote was to ask the young lady if she knew what company she was—"

"What is that to you?" demanded Whiting.

"I am not partial to gamblers and knaves," Vaughan asserted as calmly as ever.

"So you resort to groundless charges to cover up your own infamy. I deny that the note was what you say. You tried to force your company upon the young lady; you asked her to meet you in the next car."

"Hold on, all on ye!" broke in a commanding voice among the spectators. "You two may stan' thar all night an' indulge in charges, statements, an' sech egregious things, an' never be an artom nigher the facks. Facks, my good frien's, is the most important things out. My fam'ly has always aimed ter hev as many facks as it could conveniently stan' up under, an' I consait the same things won't be out o' place hyar. S'pose we put in the note as evidence?"

The speaker pushed forward and stood near Whiting. He was the wearer of the fur cap casually mentioned before.

More distinctly seen now, he proved to be a tall, bony man of about fifty years. In every way he looked like a veteran mountaineer. His fur cap was matched by a rusty old hunting-suit, while in one hand he held a rifle of unusual length. He had a good-natured face, with signs of humor lurking around his large mouth, but it was an intelligent face, and the wide jaws told of firmness which, if aroused, would make him a determined opponent.

Whiting, however, looked at him angrily and scornfully.

"Who in blazes are you?" he demanded.

"I dunno any good reason why I should walk up an' give my pedigree, but I don't mind sayin' that my name is Yank Yellowbird."

The veteran's reply created a stir among some of the passengers which indicated that they had heard of him before, but the name conveyed nothing to Whiting's mind.

"What do you want here?" he demanded.

"I'm a witness," was the quiet reply, "an' not me, neither; but I've got the note you have away. S'pose we read it an' hev the case settled, fur I hate a quarrel like hurley. Le's hev the note read!"

"I deny that you have the note," cried the judge.

"How d'ye know, ef, as you lately said, you dunno what has become on't?"

"I certainly did not give it to you."

"You chucked it inter the seat whar I set."

"It is false as—"

The mountaineer's broad hand fell upon Whiting's shoulder.

"I wouldn't say it ef I's you. The Yellowbirds are nat'rally o' a mild, amiable disposition, but they are subject ter chronic newrolgy which can't be kept in when it gits ter ragin'. Don't rile up the newrolgy, mister! Don't dispute my word!"

Quiet and even was the tall mountaineer's voice, but there was an undercurrent which warned Whiting that he was treading on dangerous ground. He had sense enough to realize that the bony Western rover could handle him as he pleased, and he moved hastily away from the strong hand which had rested on his shoulder.

"Friend, will you give me the note?" asked Vaughan.

"Justice ter both parties," answered Yank Yellowbird, "calls fur a neutral party ter read it. This is him."

And he handed the paper to Central Pacific Paul.

CHAPTER V.

DRAWN REVOLVERS.

By this time every one in the car knew of the trouble, and the men were anxious to see and hear it to the end. On the other hand the women were greatly alarmed, and some were ready to flee from the car at the first sign of dangerous hostility. Leonice cowered back next to the window, embarrassed and confused, while Madam Pulaski held the girl's hand firmly to reassure her. Madam was not sorry to see Whiting in trouble, but she was prepared to defend Leonice from any trouble that menaced her.

Yank Yellowbird handed the note to the Overland detective as before said, at the same time adding:

"Read it, ef ye please."

"I object to having the affair made public!" cried Whiting.

"Your objection comes rather late," dryly replied Central Pacific Paul, "since it was you who began the public talk and forced it to this issue. You deny that this piece of paper is the note in question. Very well, then—you cannot object to my reading it."

"That's sound logic," added Yank, with a nod.

"Read on!" directed several voices.

Paul Ballard began. Whiting was tempted to spring forward and grasp at the note, but he saw the mountaineer looking at him in a way he did not like. He dared not anger that muscular man of the West.

The detective read the letter through in a clear voice, and those who had lately been ready to side with the judge looked doubtful. They could not tell who was in the right, or the wrong.

There was one man who felt no doubt. When Heber Arlington heard the free use of his name he was startled and angry. He was all that the letter asserted, but it was vitally necessary to prevent proof of the fact. He had but little time to study the situation, and he arrived at a hasty conclusion. Believing that Hubert Vaughan was the only one who held his secret he determined to force hostilities, make a pretext for using his revolver, and shoot Vaughan before he could reveal more.

He moved quickly.

"By the fiends!" he cried, "I allow no one to make so free with my name. That fellow has lied about me, and he shall retract!"

Another moment and a revolver glistened in his hand.

He moved quickly forward. He expected to see Vaughan draw a weapon, and that was to be his excuse for shooting him, but there was one thing upon which he had not counted. His course was past Ballard, and in a moment more that alert individual had twisted away the revolver and forced Arlington to his knees. No one knew just how it was done, so rapid were the detective's movements, but Arlington was made painfully conscious of the real state of affairs.

Judge Whiting's hand had been thrust into his pocket, but he suddenly found the detective confronting him with flashing eyes and half-raised revolver.

"Stand back!" cried Central Pacific Paul. "This man is my prisoner, and you interfere here at your peril!"

Then he stooped and whispered a few rapid words in Arlington's ear. No other person heard what he said, but it was enough to complete the gambler's subjection. Bold and lawless as he was, he remained upon his knees.

Whiting was surprised to see his confederate yield so tamely, but it made him more determined to resist.

"Prisoner!" he blustered; "I'd like to know by what authority you dare say that of my friend."

"You needn't worry about it, since Arlington and I are at peace, but I am like the Irishman—I will have peace if I have to fight for it. I see no need of a quarrel here, however; if you and your party are willing to put up your revolvers and bury the hatchet, I am confident Mr. Vaughan will consent. He has warned the young lady as he wished to do, and I feel sure that he is willing she should choose her own course now."

"I certainly am," Hubert answered.

"What have you to say, Judge Whiting? Is it peace or war?"

"Better make it peace, mister," advised Yank Yellowbird. "I've knowed folks ter git inter an egregious triberlation by meddlin' with war—I have, by hurley!"

Whiting glanced at Arlington.

"Go back to your seat, judge," faintly advised the gambler, still crouching under the detective's hand.

"I will," pompously announced the judge, "but I call upon all to witness that I have been outrageously treated here. I am traveling with a party of friends, and have been abused without cause. Whatever the motive of those who have acted against me, I will say that their plot has failed. That is all that I have to say."

"You have said quite enough, sir," sternly replied Central Pacific Paul. "You may thank your patron saint, if you have one, that you are out of this so well. You seem to be an Eastern man, so I will say that the next time you pick a quarrel in the West, whether as a cloak to your sins or otherwise, you may not come off with a whole skin. Now sit down!"

The detective spoke peremptorily, but released his prisoner at the same time. Arlington meekly rose. Ballard watched him sharply, but he went at once to the seat behind Leonice and sat down in silence. Whiting slowly followed him, and Ballard and the tall mountaineer took their former positions.

Mr. Van T. Stuyvesant Bliss, pale and weak-kneed, saw that there was room behind Yank Yellowbird, and he promptly appropriated it. Vaughan again became his companion. In this change of position Ballard, Vaughan, Yank and

Bliss made a quartette on one side of the car, with the judge and his party as their neighbors just across the passage.

The passengers all settled down again.

The last to take his seat was Garrett Jeffreys. When the altercation began the train-wrecker had risen, taken a huge bite of tobacco, thrust his hands into his pockets and sat down on the arm of the seat in the cheerful belief that there would be a lively fight. Unbounded disgust was expressed on his face when he saw the tame ending, and if his own plans had not required secrecy, he would have taken a hand and done his best to make the desired fight a thing of fact.

Jeffreys was not happy. The train no longer rushed over the rails with a rattle and a roar; its speed had been moderated until its pace was aggravatingly slow. Jeffreys tried to look out of the rain-beaten window, and mentally cursed the luck. Somewhere ahead his lawless band was waiting to wreck and rob the train, and he was not at all sure their ambush would ever be reached.

In fact, he half-expected the train to run headlong into a wash-out at every moment.

"Durn the rain!" he muttered, "why couldn't it hold up fur awhile?"

Silence had fallen on the occupants of the car, and no one seemed willing to begin conversation, but Yank Yellowbird's voice finally rose in a mild, confidential tone.

"This is gettin' to be a good 'eal of a shower," he remarked. "It wouldn't s'prise me a tall ef we had a deluge ekul ter that o' the year 1799, when my great-gran'father, Noah Yellowbird, built his Ark an' floated all the way from St. Louis ter China. Thar never has be'n a flood yit except the Yellowbirds got inter them. Moses Yellowbird got ketched in a big shower once, an' had ter lay down in the bulrushes ter 'scape it, an' he got his feet mortal wet as 'twas. My voy'lent newrolgy comes' o' my gittin' too much water when I's a boy o' nineteen or twenty. I disrecolleck the exact date; I ain't very good on sech things, though I had a brother who was sure death on dates. Ax him anything that had happened in the past, or was goin' ter happen in the futur', an' he'd tell ye the date ter a day, hour an' seckont. He was the most egregious critter you ever seen fur crownological facks, an' a good many on 'em was true."

The mountaineer stroked his beard and looked seriously at Central Pacific Paul.

"Your family, I believe, has been a remarkable one," replied Ballard, smiling.

"I don't know o' one more remarkabler. Thar never was a wonderful thing did yit but the Yellowbirds had a finger in the pie, an' ef thar was plums thar, they was likely ter run in their hull hand. I'm afeard I don't keep up the fam'ly pedigree in all respects. My gran'-father was a sojer-chap, great on the tick-tacks o' war, an' a sort o' heroical figger in seven or eight diff'rent wars. He riz rapidly from the ranks, holdin' one persition arter another, an' was third corporal when he died. I should 'a' took ter the army only I was so egregiously afflicted with newrolgy, an' my left foot was a coward. It's a weak sister, is my left foot."

"Your record in the West does not show it."

"Some o' the truest facks in history ain't put down in the books."

"The Indians of the border regard you as a sort of terror. It was they, I believe, who named you 'Nevermiss.'"

"Jes' so; an' I can shoot a rifle pretty straight. But land o' Goshen! the Injuns ain't no need ter worry. I never t'ech one on 'em ef he lets me alone."

"I am well aware of it, mountaineer; your reputation is widespread. Men say that you never enter a fight or quarrel when you can avoid it, but, once in, you generally win. You are said to be a lamb in peace, and a lion in war. Honest people find in you a champion; knaves find in you a bad enemy."

"So that's my reputation, eh? Wal, I'm much obleeged, 'specially fur the news that I'm a lamb in peace. Always suspected I looked sheepish, by hurley!"

The veteran's gray eyes twinkled, and his humorous mouth expanded in a genial smile.

Van T. Stuyvesant Bliss leaned quickly forward.

"Excuse me, sir," he politely said, "but you have referred to your ancestors, a subject of deep interest to me. I, sir, am engaged in the business of genealogical researches, and my reason for coming West is to search for the lineal and collateral descendants of several families whose record, genealogical, historical and biographical, I am writing for publication. While in this part of the country it is my desire to get such genealogical facts from all with whom I meet as are accessible."

Mr. Bliss delivered this explanation in a ponderous manner, showing that he was greatly in earnest, while Yank listened with marked gravity.

"A very proper idee, by hurley!" he declared.

"You say your family is an old one."

"Ef the fu'st on 'em was alive he'd be atrocious old."

"I mean, you trace them back several generations."

"To be sure."

"I should be happy to record such facts as you possess."

"All right."

Bliss produced a note-book.

"What was your father's name?"

"Joshua Nicodemus."

"A Scriptural name."

"Jes' so. My gran'father, ye see, was a sojer chap, an' great on tick-tacks. He named his son Joshua out o' respect fur Gin'ral Joshua, who commanded the sun ter stan' still. I s'pose he thought my father would grow up inter jest sech a man, but the tick-tacks wa'n't any good in that case. I hate ter say it, but my father was so lazy that he let the sun roll right on, while he stood still hisself. My father could do more standin' still in a sartain time than any man I ever knowed."

"When was he born?"

"Wal, that is suthin' that never could be foun' out."

"How was that?"

"The exact date never was l'arned, owin' ter the fact that none o' the folks was at home at the time."

"I don't understand."

"It happened in this way. Thar was a June trainin' o' militia, an' as my gran'father was a corporal, he went along—'twas ten miles away—an' took his wife with him. They was thar a week, an' my gran'father said he never seen better tick-tacks in his life. The militia marched an' tramped until my gran'father raised a big blister on his left thumb-toe, an' he was pooty nigh fagged out when the week ended. He an' my gran'mother went home, an' when they got thar, thar was their son, Joshua. That's how ariz the doubt as ter when he was born, neither his father nor mother bein' present at the time. One on 'em alwas insisted 'twas on a Tuesday, while t'other would hev it 'twas a Thursday."

"Sir," said Mr. Bliss, stiffly, "I do not wish to be made the object of levity."

"Don't blame ye a bit, mister."

"Then why do you make such an absurd statement?"

"Wait a bit stranger. The Yellowbirds are a mild, even-dispositioned race, but you kin rile them egregiously ef ye cast doubts on the fam'ly pedigree. Facks is facks, an' they can't be denied, an' him who disputes the fam'ly history makes me his enemy right off, quick."

"Pardon me, sir, but what you said seemed so extraordinary—never mind, however. I meant no harm. In what year did this occur?"

"I can't tell ye that."

"No?"

"No. It was Tuesday or Thursday, but as the year didn't seem o' importance, it was never sot down in the fam'ly record. All I kin tell you is that my father was born later than my gran'father."

Bliss began to doubt the sanity of the mountaineer, but he determined to try one more question.

"Do you trace your family back of your grandfather?"

"Why, sartain. We trace it cl'ar back ter Adam Yellowbird, who married Eve Smith an' lived at Eden Garden, an' we'd have it funder only Adam accidentally used the previous record ter light his pipe, an' 'twas all lost. We only know that Adam's father was named Ebenezer Yellowbird, an' that he was a telegraph operator in Connecticut."

A look of hopeless bewilderment stole over Bliss's face, but at that moment there was a heavy shock and the passengers were thrown forward in their seats with painful force.

The train came to a standstill.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAPTIVE TRAIN.

THE passengers recovered their equilibrium as soon as possible. They had been expecting something of the kind, and when it was found that nobody was injured, they felt that they might consider themselves lucky, even if they were at a full stop in the wildest region along the line.

A brakeman opened the door of the car in which were the characters of our narrative and shouted a few words.

"Don't be alarmed!" he directed. "There is no accident, but the flood has torn up the track and we must look to the way before we go on. Please keep your seats!"

Some of the passengers obeyed this direction, while others did not. Mr. Bliss, whose eyeglasses had been seriously disarranged, had no sooner settled them down than he saw a shaggy head rise by Yank Yellowbird's shoulder.

"What's that?" he asked, quickly.

"Looks some like a dog, don't it?" mildly inquired the mountaineer.

"Yes, certainly; but I didn't know you had a dog with you."

"You ain't the only one that way. He's a stowaway, Moses is, an' ain't paid no fare. I consait even the conductor don't know he's aboard."

"A fine-looking animal. What did you call him?"

"Moses."

"A peculiar name for a dog."

"Summut, possibly, but he's a peculiar dog. Found him under peculiar circumstances which suggested Moses Yellowbird, my ancestor who was found in the bulrushes by Hagar, the daughter o' Nebuchadnezzar, as you may hev heard about. He's a good dog, Moses is."

Yank laid his hand upon the dog's head affectionately, and was rewarded by an expressive glance from the big, brown eyes. Moses was a large dog, but he was not handsome. He seemed to have seen hard usage, for there were suggestive scars upon his body. His general aspect was suspicious and unsocial, but his master found him a devoted and faithful companion. If he was misanthropical in his intercourse with the rest of the world, he gave Yank all the affection possible.

The mountaineer's finger followed one long scar on the animal's side.

"The bullet that did that come nigh takin' Moses off, but it was the means o' sending him ter me. 'Twas in one o' my campaigns when I had Kansas Kitten, an' others, fur my fr'en's, an' they kin tell his good p'int's ef ye ever meet them. Thar ain't no rumpus, Moses, an' you'd better lay down afore you're axed fur yer fare. I don't b'lieve you've got forty-seven cents in yer vest-pocket, by hurley!"

Central Pacific Paul was among those who had left the car to see what was the trouble. Rain was still falling furiously, but he had garments intended to defy the elements, and he equipped himself properly. He walked forward through the train until he had passed the foremost car, when he descended to the lower step.

A few rods in advance he could see the moving red lights of the trainmen, who were surveying the track. Where Ballard stood the water was running over the rails to the depth of three or four inches.

He was not to be hindered by this, so he stepped off and hurried ahead. The depth of water increased as he went. He soon overtook the trainmen. He then learned that the stop had been occasioned by the steadily increasing roughness of the track, and that they feared a complete wash-out had taken place a few rods ahead.

Their opinion was soon verified. They reached a point where a wide gulch came down to the track: just the place to gather the water of a flood. It had done so on this occasion; a river was dashing down from the ridges to the north; and where the track had once been there was then a gap twenty feet deep and over a hundred feet wide. Through this rushed the unnatural river, its foam-crested surface showing in marked contrast to the dark earth around it, the equally dark rocks and the night, itself.

Conductor Peters lowered his lantern.

"This settles it," he observed. "We've got to stay right where we are for the present. Four hundred track-layers couldn't take us over the gap to-night, for that torrent can't be checked. Fortunately, we shall not suffer. We have food enough to last several days, with care."

"You don't expect to stay here 'several days,' do you?" asked a passenger.

"I hope we shall not."

"That don't sound sanguine."

"I may as well tell you that I have never seen a rain like this in all my experience, and it has caught us in the worst part of the Overland journey. We are in the wildest region through which we pass, and many miles from any town. I suspect that if the rain continues through the night the track will be gone for miles, both ahead and behind us. In that case, what are we to do? The women and children can't walk to any town, owing to the great distance, and it will be a long job to fit the track for our passage even at a snail's pace."

The conductor moved away a few paces, while the questioner turned to Central Pacific Paul and grumbly observed:

"Looks as though we were bottled up here for several days."

"Possibly we are."

"A pretty time we shall have of it. We shall all die of the blues, with nothing to stir us up."

This prophet had occasion to change his opinion before the end of the adventure.

A short distance away stood three men who were, perhaps, the most disappointed of all the passengers. They were Garrett Jeffreys, Jake Blade and Dan Hopper. To them the state of affairs meant something more than a temporary hindrance. A few miles away their confederates were waiting to wreck and pillage the train, and there it was at a standstill.

"It's most villainous luck!" growled Jeffreys.

"Too blamed bad!" agreed Blade.

"Thar was plenty o' plunder for us all, ef we could have gone on."

"Mebbe we kin do a leetle somethin' on the sly," suggested Hopper. "Half o' the passengers won't go nigh the sleepin'-car, fur a good many was goin' ter git off at the next station, where we was due at two o'clock. As 'tis now they've got ter sleep in the common cars, an' we three kin pick pockets as wal as throw a train off the track."

"Mighty little booty we'd get," replied Jeffreys. "All the rich crowd, with their money

an' watches, is booked for the sleepers, an' we can't get at them. The plunder we could get off the common truck wouldn't buy a dog's house."

"It might not, an' we might strike a miner with a bag o' gold."

"See hyar," suddenly exclaimed Blade, "why can't one o' us go an' bring the band hyar? It ain't over five miles now ter whar they be."

"How many mad rivers o' flood-water d'ye suppose there are along that five miles?" Jeffreys sharply asked.

"I didn't think o' that."

"Do you want the job o' goin'?"

"I reckon not."

"I do!" abruptly announced Hopper.

"No!"

"I say yes. Give me five shares o' the plunder, instead o' one, an' I'll go fur the boyees. Once let 'em know what the racket is an' they ain't the lads ter hesitate. Duke Griffin is the man ter swim floods ef anybody kin."

"Ursula is thar," muttered Blade.

"I reckon my gal kin take care of herself," retorted Jeffreys. "Wal, Dan, I ain't doubtin' the readiness o' the lieutenant ter lead them hyar, but can you get through? See that flood ahead of us! Looks to me like sure death ter get into it, an' thar are other rivers beyond."

"I know all that, but I'm a tough old knot, Cap, an' ef you say the word, promisin' me five shares, I'll take the resk. How is it?"

"Lord bless ye, Dan, you shall have ten shares ef you bring the band."

"That settles it, an' I'm off. Either we hev this train ter sack, or Dan Hopper goes under this blessed night!"

The sturdy villain uttered the words with determination which would have been admirable had he been engaged in a good cause, for the danger before him was of a nature which would have deterred the majority of even the bravest of men. Jeffreys was of the opinion that his follower was going to his death, but human life was not rated high among the train-wreckers, and if Hopper could bring the band it would be a great thing.

The messenger lost no time, but, bidding his associates remain where they were and let him work alone, he moved away toward the north.

"He's a gone goose!" quoth Jake Blade.

"I'm afeerd so, but it was his own offer."

"He may bring the boyees."

"By Judas! he shall get all I promised if he does. Hey, Jake, what a feast ef the band was only hyar! There stands the train, an' we could go through it like a blizzard; they would be wholly at our mercy. Why, we could tackle them while they was asleep an' lay out ev'ry soul on 'em, an' then throw them in the flood an' leave only a small trace behind when we had upset the train in some way."

Hopper had by this time disappeared, and the other wreckers made their way back to the car they had lately left. They were on the alert, and had eyes for all that was to be seen. Neither expected to see Hopper bring the band, and they were not above making a small haul if a big one was out of reach. Money, watches, and jewels had a charm to them, and there was liable to be trouble during the night.

When the conductor had satisfied himself that nothing could be done, he retraced his steps, and a report was duly made to the passengers. Owing to the wash-out, no further progress could be made that night, and everybody must make the best of the situation, and be as contented as possible. There was no danger. Some water was running over the track, but the surface of the surrounding ridges was such that the cars could not be overturned, nor the ground cut away under the rails.

This was all the consolation that could be given them, and it was taken according to the nature of each passenger: some accepted it as a good joke, others philosophically, and a third class grumbled and lamented.

Few had ever been in such a situation before. They were in the heart of the wild, pathless hills; the nearest village was far away, and they were obliged to pass the night in a novel habitation—a train at a standstill in midsummer, cut off from the rest of the world.

Conversation was brisk for some time, but the majority soon began to think of retiring. Hubert Vaughan was not in such a mood, and he went to the smoking-car to seek consolation in a cigar. He noticed, as he crossed the platform, that the rain had almost entirely ceased, but the heavy clouds which hung overhead did not promise a return to pleasant weather. Yank Yellowbird soon followed Vaughan's course, and, with his dog, settled down at one end of the car and seemed to fall asleep.

Vaughan finished his cigar, but his mood had not changed: he was still without inclination to sleep. He raised the nearest window and looked out. The lull in the storm continued, and the water had abated somewhat; it no longer ran across the track.

He looked to the rocks beyond, and regretted the drenched state of nearly everything which kept him in the car. Then he noticed one cliff, the top of which bent toward the train, and it occurred to him that its base must be dry, the rain having come from the other quarter.

He arose and left the car. The soil was sandy, and had already absorbed so much of the water that there was no trouble in walking. He found the recess under the cliff as dry as he could wish, and there he sat down. His journey had been a momentary diversion, but his thoughts quickly returned to the old subject.

Madam Pulaski—always Madam Pulaski!

Why had she reappeared to awaken recollections he had been bravely trying to bury? What evil fate had again sent her across his path? Why could they not have lived and died apart?

The rattling of a stone aroused him. He looked up and saw some one approaching from the direction of the train. It was a woman. He saw this, and then grew startled as the conviction came to him that he recognized that advancing figure.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAUSE OF ENMITY.

WITH the idea still strong within his mind, Vaughan mechanically rose. The darkness of the recess concealed him and he had not been discovered in turn, but he knew the truth at last. The female figure was that of Madam Pulaski, and she was seeking the same shelter that he had sought before her.

The idea occurred to him that she had come on purpose to see him, and he would have avoided her if he could, but by the time he had fully identified her it was too late to leave without being discovered.

Instead, he folded his arms and awaited her arrival with stern composure.

She entered the recess, and discovering that it was dry, breathed a sigh of relief. Then she looked around as though to find a place where she could sit, but such thoughts fled from her mind as she discovered the human figure only a few feet away. She started back with a faint cry.

"Don't be alarmed," composedly directed the man. "I am not going to harm you, whether you knew of my presence or not."

"Hubert Vaughan!"

"Exactly."

"I did not know you were here," she said, hurriedly. "I beg your pardon—I would not have intruded—"

"Don't mention it. You have as much right here as I."

"I will go away."

"Suit yourself."

There was both coldness and contempt in his voice and her face flushed. Her head was raised with proud resentment, but she forced herself to answer quietly:

"Before I go I want to say that I don't blame you for the note you wrote to Leonice Ross."

"No?"

"I feel sure that you did it for the best. The words of that note are branded upon my memory, and I know to whom you referred when you wrote that one of Leonice's companions was 'a dangerous person.' You referred to me."

"And you don't blame me?"

"No."

"Will you admit that I spoke the truth?"

"Do I need to admit it?"

"Not to me."

Vaughan answered bitterly, and then more slowly added:

"You are as much a puzzle as ever, Margaret Roland. Few persons are so ready to admit their sins and shortcomings."

"Have I admitted anything?"

"No; but you do not deny anything."

"There was a time when I did!" murmured Madam Pulaski, her voice falling almost to a whisper.

"I know—I know. Don't let us speak of the folly, weakness and sin of the past. I have outlived all the pain and bitterness of those days"—he spoke bravely, and tried to convince himself as well as her—"and I can act without emotion or prejudice. One word with you, however—will you tell me of the party you are with?"

"Certainly. What would you know?"

"Who are they?"

"Leonice Ross is an Eastern girl. Her parents are both dead, and she is on her way to the Pacific Coast to live with her guardian, Judge Whiting. He was her father's dearest friend, but he has been many years in this part of the country. When Mr. Ross died he selected Whiting as Leonice's guardian, and it was the wish of all parties that she should go to his home to live."

This explanation was made so freely that Vaughan's opinion was staggered.

"What is your place in the party?" he asked, slowly.

"I am Leonice's companion."

"Why did you say that you did not blame me for writing the note?"

"Because I knew you acted for what you considered Leonice's good."

"Can you truthfully say that you know Whiting to be an honorable man?"

"I answer for no one. The judge is almost a stranger to me; we never met until a month ago."

Vaughan did not fail to detect the evasion.

"I believe Whiting to be a rascal," he declared. "I have learned that the so-called Heber Arlington is, really, a notorious gambler known as 'Blonde Pete.' As for the judge, he did not act like an honest man in the car. If he had been honest he would have made known the contents of the note as soon as he spoke of it at all, and met me on the true ground. What did he do, really? He lied as to the contents, and tried to destroy the note. Was that the way of an honest, innocent man?"

"I am not his defender or accuser."

"I hope Miss Ross is not in any danger. I have no more interest in her than I should have in any worthy woman, but she seems deserving of a better lot than to fall among sharpers."

"She is deserving of all the good that can fall to any one," earnestly replied Madam Pulaski.

"And are you her friend?"

"Yes."

"I hope she will find you a true one."

"You speak in a tone of doubt, and I don't know that I blame you. You have no cause to think well of me, but—I hope your life is not less happy because you met me in the past."

"Do you? Your judgment tells you what my reply, must be. If woman ever did wrong to a man, you wronged me, Margaret Roland. Suppose I told the story to any disinterested third party, how do you think they would regard it? I would frame the story something like this:

"I was born rich. I came of a family renowned for their indolence; having ample means, they never engaged in any kind of business. My nature was a trifle like theirs, and up to my twenty-fifth birthday I had been as idle as they. Then a change came over me. I found that many persons despised me for my idle life. They argued that every man having health and intelligence should do his part to help along the world with strong blows in some good cause."

"All this came to my ears and made me vexed and angry, and when an unusually severe and uncalled-for remark reached my sensitive ears—over-sensitive, perhaps—I made a sudden resolution. I would become a lawyer! I plunged into study; I pored over books early and late; I developed the indefatigability of a willing slave; and in due time I was ready for practice. Had I made friends by my new departure? Not one; everybody laughed at the idea of an indolent Vaughan being of any practical use in the world. They said that I would soon tire of it, and fall back into my slothful state."

"About this time I met Margaret Roland. We were thrown much together by circumstances, and I learned to admire her. I told her my story, and there found the sympathy no one else would give me. She encouraged me; she urged me on; she prophesied success; and her kind words won my heart. I use the term advisedly."

"At last I hung out my sign and, fully-fledged as a lawyer, waited for clients. None came; no one would trust 'an indolent Vaughan,' and they said as much openly. They doubted, not my honor, but my lasting zeal; no one dared give me a case lest I should grow indolent in the midst of my work and neglect his interest. All this stung me to the quick. Indolent as the Vaughans had been, they had been proud of their honor, their far-reaching ancestry and their intelligence. And I was the laughing-stock of the town."

"I grew abnormally sensitive, and would have abandoned all hope and fled the place had it not been for Margaret Roland. She bade me persevere, and her sympathy grew so precious to me that—well, we became engaged lovers before my first client came."

"When that client did come I, not she, made the overtures. It was a widow with three small children, desperately poor, fighting against a corporation which had robbed her and her babes of all their worldly possessions because of a claim they asserted they had had upon her lately-deceased husband. When she appeared in court she had no lawyer, and no money to secure one. I volunteered; I secured a postponement; I became her lawyer."

"Other men have labored with zeal, but no man ever surpassed the zeal with which I worked in that case. I was determined to vindicate the family name, and show that the Vaughans were all that they claimed, and all that the public denied that they were. I studied the case; I found things that appeared strange; I investigated them and made discoveries of great importance. What I learned I told to one person only, and that person was my client; it was Margaret Roland. She professed deep interest and sympathy, and when she came to my office I told her all."

"When the day of the trial came I felt sure of victory. I had discovered weak points in the case of my opponents which, I felt sure, they did not know of. I knew they had been ignorant of them when the sun went down the previous day. My first disappointment in court came when Margaret Roland failed to appear as I had expected; the second—how can I describe it? In one word I found that the opposition had the very knowledge which I could have sworn they did not possess, and in every way they were fortified against me, while their own

batteries utterly swept my case out of sight and out of existence."

"I lost my case. Let that tell the story briefly."

"I went home almost maddened; I went home hopelessly perplexed. I did not know how to account for it, but even then I was positive that I had been betrayed; that some one had laid my case bare to the opposition. But I was wholly at a loss to surmise who had done it, for I had trusted only Margaret Roland."

"Reaching home, I found upon my desk a note which proved to be from her. It stunned me at the time, but I remember it distinctly now. It was brief and as follows:

"Hubert, forget me, for you will never see me again. I am not worthy of you or of your love, and I have played a false part in my acquaintance with you. I can explain nothing, but I am gone forever from this place and from your sight. Once more—forget me!"

"There was the accursed letter in her own handwriting. Shall I try to describe how I felt? I don't think I will, except in one particular. Reading that note I remembered that some one had betrayed me to the rival lawyers, and that to Margaret only had I confided my secrets. I would not—I could not then believe what logic told me was true."

"Something made me think of the train which left the place at about that time. I looked at my watch and found that I had barely time to reach the depot. I went and arrived just as the train was starting. I looked eagerly at the passengers, and in one seat, earnestly talking, I saw Margaret Roland and a man whom I had never seen before, whom I have not seen since, but whose face I shall never forget. I should know him though we met in Alaska or Australia."

"I might have boarded the train, but I felt dazed and stunned. The train left the station, and I saw the pair no more. I went back to my home—my office I never entered again. I had conducted my first and last case. When I went on the street men smiled with pitying derision; they had prophesied my failure, and it had come to pass. They did not know how I had been betrayed."

"Determined to settle the matter I went to the office of the rival lawyers. I asked the name of the person who had betrayed me, but not a word of information would they give. I was baffled there, but light came from another source. I learned beyond a doubt that Margaret Roland had been secretly to their office, and then I knew the worst."

"Let me tell briefly what her treachery did. It deprived the impoverished widow and her babies of what was justly theirs, and they might have starved had I not ordered my agent to pay them a certain sum every week—which has been done to this time. As to me, I had at once left my home."

"That treachery made me a wanderer on the face of the earth. It deprived me of mental strength to make an effort to be a laborer in life's battle; it left my critics to point to me sneeringly as the greatest failure among the Vaughans; and it has ruined my whole life."

"Margaret Roland I once saw in Saratoga, where she was leading a gay, brilliant life. I talked with her calmly. She offered no explanation of her conduct, but did deny having betrayed me to the rival lawyers. Our interview was short, and, half an hour later, I was gone from Saratoga. I never saw her again until to-night."

"How is it, Madam Pulaski, does Margaret's story interest you?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIGHT PROWLER.

VAUGHAN had spoken in a style which varied with the variations of his subject. At times he was cool and calm, and then the memory of his past misery would control his mind and his utterances would become rapid and bitter.

Madam Pulaski did not once try to interrupt. The narrative was not new to her; she heard nothing but what she knew, or had before been told at Saratoga; but she let him talk as he would. If it was his wish to speak, it was her punishment to listen, and she bore it as she had borne all her sorrows—bravely, yet with inward pain and shrinking which was pitiful.

Vaughan asked the closing question and was silent. He did not know what effect the story he had impulsively told had had upon Madam Pulaski—she had stood very quiet, and the darkness hid her face—but she answered in a voice which, though low, was ready enough.

"I find nothing to admire in the story of Margaret Roland," she replied.

"For once, we are of one mind."

"It is possible, though, that the woman was more sinned against than sinning."

"Did I do her any injury?"

"Not you; not you!" she exclaimed. "You were all that was good and noble. Don't misunderstand me. I wronged you, but I say to you now, as I said at Saratoga, that I did not betray you to the rival lawyers."

"Then why did you go to their office?"

"Because I was deceived."

"By whom?"

"That I cannot tell."

"I have little faith in an innocence that cannot explain itself."

"I do not expect you to believe me, and, perhaps, it is as well that you should not. I am not worthy of your respect. One thing I wish to say, however. If I deceived you I did it because I saw opened to me a degree of happiness which, coming after my wretched past, blinded me and deprived me of judgment. It was never in my nature to be the woman that I was, but unmerciful sorrow and persecution had closed me in from the happiness other people have, and I yielded to the movement of the tide and tried to find peace."

"Vague as a dream!" muttered Vaughan.

"I know it."

"One thing you will, perhaps, tell me. If you did not betray me to the rival lawyers, who did?"

"I cannot tell."

"Yet you know?"

"I suspect—yes, I almost know."

"And yet you let it go on; you allowed me to be ruined—"

"No, no!" Madam Pulaski exclaimed. "I did not know—I did not suspect then. Had I done so I would have warned you at all costs. I suspect, but do not know who betrayed you. Believe me, that is all."

"Was it any one whom I knew?"

"I think not."

"I am sufficiently answered; it was the man with whom you left town; the man with whom I saw you on the train that miserable day."

Madam Pulaski was silent.

"Will you tell me who he was?" Vaughan continued.

"I cannot do it."

"Perhaps we may meet again some day. His face is indelibly branded upon my memory, and if we do meet I shall know him. After that—well, we will see!"

"Beware!" Margaret cried. "Do not think of him; if you meet him, turn aside as you would from a tiger. That man is all that is cruel and merciless. He holds human life as a mere nothing, and the blood of other men is on his hands. He is a dead shot, who can fire before others can draw weapon. Do not think of seeking satisfaction at his hands."

Vaughan looked at her sharply. Her voice betrayed unusual agitation, and the nature of her words indicated that she feared for him. He was suspicious, however, and inclined to believe that she feared, not for him, but for the unknown man.

He did not at once reply, and Madam Pulaski hurriedly added:

"I must go back to the car. I did not suspect when I came that any one else was here, or I should not have intruded. I could not sleep, so I left the car and sought fresh air. Do not think that I intended to annoy you."

At the last word she turned and hurried away. Vaughan managed to say that he believed the latest meeting to be purely accidental, but she did not stop to answer him, and his own words seemed weak to him. He watched until she disappeared from view, and then began pacing to and fro in the shadow of the cliff.

The interview had only served to stir up his restless, moody feelings more and more. He had endeavored for years to cast all thoughts of Margaret Roland from his mind, and as trouble had brought to the surface latent firmness for which no one had given the older Vaughans credit, he had succeeded in outliving the past in a measure, though never in forgetting her; but now all was recalled, and his mind was in a miserable state.

For a long time he walked his self-chosen beat, but rain finally began to fall again, and he returned to the train and sought his quarters in the sleeping-car.

Half an hour passed. Once more rain was falling rapidly, and all the water-courses were being freshly supplied and increased.

A man left one of the ordinary cars and stood hesitatingly on the platform. The light fell upon him and revealed the face of Jake Blade. He crossed the platform and peered into the next car, which was a "sleeper." All was quiet and still there, and his eyes lighted up as he saw the porter comfortably sleeping in one corner.

The train-wrecker gazed at the man critically. Was his sleep sound enough to keep him unconscious? Blade's hand fell to his knife. If the worst came, he had an ally there which he knew how to make useful.

Slowly he opened the car-door. No sound betrayed him, and the porter slept on. Blade cautiously entered and closed the door behind him. He gazed greedily at the row of berths along the car. Those who slept there had money, watches and jewelry. Perhaps the greater part of this treasure had been deposited where he could not get it; but past experience, when he had aided to rob wrecked trains, had shown him that many persons went to sleep with their watches in their pockets and their money on their persons.

He hoped that he would find a bonanza—and escape detection.

Carefully he moved down the passage. He did not know the occupant of any berth and

must trust to luck, but his hopes were strong. He selected a berth at random. The curtain hung without a motion, and he believed that he could hear heavy breathing within—but heaving breathing sounded on all sides.

He pushed the curtain back. The recess was dark, but under the blankets he could see the outline of a quiet form. Whether it was man or woman he could not tell. He pushed one hand forward—it encountered another hand, provokingly extended just where he did not expect to find it.

Instantly there was a sudden start and a head was raised from the pillow—a woman's head. Then a startled cry rung out sharply on the still air; a cry for help.

Blade dropped the curtain and started for the door. He knew that his last hope was gone, for nothing less than a general disturbance would follow a woman's alarm. His retreat was suddenly interrupted. A man, fully dressed, leaped from one of the berths, and Jake found him directly in the way. Before either could avoid it there was a collision, and down they went with a crash which added to the confusion.

The train-wrecker found himself on top and hope revived. He was very muscular, and had unbounded confidence in himself. He exerted his strength and prepared to demolish his opponent, but, greatly to his surprise, he was suddenly whirled over and their positions were reversed. The wrecker became the under man; he found that he had met his master and hope died away; but there was a new diversion in his favor.

The porter had been awakened, and he rushed forward with great zeal. Laying hold of the first man he came to, he took that person unawares and rolled him over on the floor. This was the unknown man, and Jake Blade found himself wholly free. He did not neglect the precious chance; springing to his feet, he darted out of the car.

Confusion reigned in that place, and the startled cries of women mingled with the rougher exclamations of men. The porter suddenly found himself bumped over on the floor and confronted with the angry face of the man he had seized.

"You fool!" exclaimed that gentleman, "do you know what you have done? You have let the disturber, whoever and whatever he was, escape, while you clung to me!"

Several other men had approached.

"What's all the row about?" asked one.

"This man is a robber!" declared the porter, pointing to his adversary.

"Lynch him!" suggested a hot-headed passenger.

"Keep your advice to yourself!" retorted the accused man. "If I didn't pity you, I would advise you to beware of the fool-killer. Men with brains usually make sure they are right before they go ahead. As for me, if any one wants to know who I am, let him consult conductor Peters."

"What is wanted of me?" asked a ready voice, and the conductor entered the car and advanced to the group.

"We want a little common sense from you to aid your porter, who is alarmingly deficient," answered the previous speaker. "I was awakened by a disturbance in the car; I sprung out of my berth and seized a man who was making haste to leave, and had succeeded in overpowering him when the porter attacked me and let the man escape. Now your porter says I am a robber. I don't want my name made public, Peters, but perhaps you can convince these astute gentlemen—one of whom wants me lynched—that I am not a robber."

"Whoever says you are is a liar!" bluntly replied the conductor. "They had better accuse me."

Peters knew what he was saying, for the object of the porter's accusation was none other than Central Pacific Paul, and the railroad detective, quiet as he was in his methods, was known to every conductor on the Overland route. Both Peters and Ballard were thoroughly angry at the course of events, and the detective additionally so, because he had gained no clear view of the intruder's face, and would not know him if they met again.

"Take charge, Ballard," added Peters—there was no objection to the use of that name, for Paul's fame as a detective was confined to his sobriquet—"and find out what is up."

"The lady who has been alarmed," announced Judge Whiting, "is my ward, Miss Ross. No doubt some one tried to rob her."

"I would like to speak with her," said Ballard.

He did so, and Leonice explained all that she knew, which was but little. She had been asleep when another hand had closed over her own; she had cried out when she awoke and saw a man's head in front of her; and then he had fled. She had not recognized him.

The truth was soon learned by Ballard and Peters. The porter had fallen asleep, and a would-be thief had seized the chance to enter the car. No one found anything missing, and it was decided that nothing had been stolen, so the matter resolved itself into a severe lecture to the porter for leaving the door unfastened and

sleeping without regard to the safety of his charges.

Peters walked back through the other cars—those where the men who could not, or did not afford berths were sleeping in the eccentric positions peculiar to such cases, and which make the scene a good deal of the cattle-car order—but nothing came of it.

He did not expect there would. The prowler had had ample time to stow himself away, and he had done the work well.

Jake Blade abandoned his scheme then and there. No watches or money for him at present, and he had to pin all his faith and hope on the small chance that Dan Hopper would be able to reach the wrecker band, and that Jeffreys's lieutenant, Duke Griffin, would lead the men there in time to plunder the train.

When Blade fell asleep the rain was beating against the window, and the prospect for the morrow was not pleasant.

CHAPTER IX.

THE UNLUCKY MINERS.

THE night passed without further excitement. Morning found the train still a captive. Once more the rain had ceased, but the heavy clouds shut out the sky and everything else which was at a distance. The gaze of the passengers could pierce the fog and mist only a few rods. The gap in front of the engine had not grown wider, but the foaming river which went whirling through the gap suggested that it might all the while be growing deeper.

The outlook was not favorable, for it was plain that the temporary river could not be passed even by the strongest men. To swim it was out of the question, owing to the rapidity of the current. Retreat was also out of the question, for another river was flowing across the track—or where the track had been—a hundred yards back of the train.

Train and passengers were literally exiled from the rest of the world. The conductor intended to send a man toward the north, to see if he could make a *detour*, pass the flood and go for help—though Peters expected aid, in any case, as soon as it could be given.

In all his experience in railroading he had never seen the equal of that storm. Wash-outs he had seen before, but never one like that.

Preparations were made for breakfast, and here Yank Yellowbird became useful. The hills were probably full of game, and there was no better time to secure it. He volunteered to go out with his rifle and dog, and Peters gladly accepted his offer.

Central Pacific Paul asked leave to accompany the mountaineer, and Yank promptly acquiesced. He had taken a fancy to the detective, and was glad to have him along. They started, with Moses walking beside them. Other dogs would have indulged in frisky manifestations at being free from the train, but Moses remained dignified.

"Hope we'll hev good luck," said Yank, "fur I consait that crowd will do some considerable eatin' afore they git out o' the egregious scrape."

"I have never had an experience like it before," replied Ballard.

"Nor me, though I allow I ain't had much experience with railroads an' keers. Usually trust ter a boss, or ter my legs. You might not think it, but them legs o' mine kin span the ground like hurley. Some legs was born fur beauty, an' some fur use. I reckon mine was fur use, an' they've got a heap on't; but they ain't han'some—not much, they ain't. Why, when I's a boy I was so bow-legged I could set straddle a boss, te'ch my heels under him an' never change my nat'ral persition."

"They seem to be straight enough now, though, possibly, a trifle lacking in point of flesh."

"To be sure, but I owe it all ter my gran'-father, the Revolutionary relict. He was a sojer-chap, an' great on the tick-tacks o' war; an' when I began ter grow up he was hangin' 'round the house, with notbin' ter do, so he allowed he was goin' ter drill me every day on'til I got the tick-tacks down fine. He took me out back o' the barn, give me a broom fur a musket, an' hisself took a birch stick."

"Fu'st thing," sez he, 'straighten out them legs o' yourn. No sojer ever kerried sech onder-pinnin'."

"I can't straighten 'em," sez I.

"They look like a bugle in coil," sez he.

"They're jest ez natur' made 'em," sez I, sulkily.

"I don't b'lieve it. Ef natur' ever did any sech job ez thet she ought to be ashamed o' herself. The tick-tacks don't like ter 'sociate with a chap with rainbow legs," sez he, "but I'll do my best fur you. Head up!" sez he, "an' keep them legs straight."

"Ef you don't like my legs," sez I, "jest let me alone. I don't want no tick-tacks, no-how."

"Misguided youth," sez he, "beware! I ain't be'n through the Involution War fur nothin', an' I know how ter deal with hardened speerits. I can't drill no recruit with legs like a hoop. Straighten 'em!" sez he, "an' he give me a sharp rap across the knee."

"Boo-hoo!" I yelled, "I don't want ter be a sojer."

"You must be," sez he, "Joshua Yellowbird was one, an' all the fam'ly has be'n sence 'cept them who didn't sarve."

"I'm one o' them," sez I.

"Ain't you no patriotism?" sez he.

"Not an artom," sez I.

"What would ye do ef a foe invaded yer country?" sez he.

"I'd skip ter Canada," sez I.

"What! run with them legs?" sez he. "You couldn't do it."

"I'll show ye," sez I; an' I was about ter cut an' run when he seized me by the collar.

"Ongenerate youth," sez he, "my heart is heavy within me. When I think o' a Yellowbird with sech a poor speerit—an' sech legs—it gnaws me ter the quick. I see but one hope fur ye, an' that is reform. I'm am Involuntary relict, an' know all the tick-tacks, an' you've got ter larn 'em."

"Darn the tick-tacks!" sez I.

"I said it an' I meant it, but it was an unlucky remark fur me. My gran'father waxed wrathful right off, an' he laid bolt on me tighter'n ever, an' the way he did whale me with that stick was tremenjous. He couldn't stan' it ter hev the tick-tacks misused. He hurt me egregiously, but I never whimpered, an' my grit appeased his wrath summut. He drilled me reg'lar fur some months, an' my legs got straight, and he always consaited the tick-tacks did it. Mebbe they did, but I reckon they couldn't drive the atrocious newrolgy out o' my system."

"It's a pity your gran'father isn't here now, to keep our travelers out of their trouble," observed Ballard.

"He'd begin by drillin' them."

"What is your opinion of the situation?"

"I don't know the kentry, an' can't say, but I allow the fix ain't pleasant. Ef the road is washed away fur miles in advance, it'll be hard fur the femines ter git away."

"That is the worst of it."

"I advise you ter watch that Whiting an' his chum, Arlington. I don't like 'em."

"There are many there whom I don't like."

"Some on 'em do hev a hang-dog look."

The mountaineer paused and looked around critically.

"Looks ez though thar might be game hyar," he added. "I consait we had better separate an' do some skirmishin'."

They did this, and success soon rewarded their efforts. In a short time they had secured more game than they could carry back with them. Central Pacific Paul had just suggested that they enlist some of the other passengers when Yank's quick hearing detected a new and suspicious sound. He looked up and saw a dozen men descending a hill not far away.

The mountaineer's first impression was unfavorable. All the men were armed with rifles, which was not strange, and their manner was of a free-and-easy, lawless style that did not please Nevermiss. He had seen men of such manners before, and knew no good of them.

He glanced quickly at Ballard.

"Do ye hev road-agents 'round hyar?"

"I think not. I don't know what they could live upon."

"I'm glad on't."

"I take it you don't like those fellows."

"I don't, by burley!"

The strangers came nearer, and no more could be said. He who walked at the head waved his hand, and they came on steadily. They were a hybrid-looking crowd, old and young, bearded and beardless being freely mixed, but all had the same strikingly unrestrained air which Yank had noticed. Their attire had evidently been gay and becoming of late, but every man was drenched to the waist and mud-covered now.

The leader, a man of about thirty-five years, who had a face not by any means ill-looking, again waved his hand.

"Hullo, critters!" he saluted.

"Hullo!" replied Ballard, after waiting in vain for Yank to answer.

"Do you keep a tavern?" asked the stranger.

"No, sir."

"We're a hungry crew. Been mining up on the hills, but the flood drove us out and buried all our gold and tools in an ocean of sand. Of all the diabolical luck you ever heard, we've struck the worst. Earnings of a year gone at one crash. We are beggars now, and as we haven't even a pinch of salt to put on our meat, we'll thank you free and hearty if you'll give us a place by your camp-fire."

"We haven't the camp-fire."

"No? How do you live?"

"Any way we can."

"Quickly said, if not frank; but that don't help men who are in trouble. We're going down by the railroad track, to see if we can catch on and ride to civilized parts."

Ballard felt that he might as well explain at once.

"There is a train down there already, imprisoned by the storm and a consequent wash-out."

"That a fact? Sorry for them, but we shall be glad to cast lots with them. Are you of the party?"

"Yes."

"Glad to meet you, and hope we shall be good friends. We are rough and humble, but my friends are true blue—I don't answer for myself. My name is Duke Griffin, and these nugget-hunters answer to names more or less picturesque."

One of the so-called nugget-hunters stooped and essayed to caress Moses's shaggy head. The dog had been eying the gang with suspicious attention, and he met this familiarity with an ominous growl and an exhibition of teeth which caused the man to retreat abruptly.

"Hullo! what sort o' a grizzly b'ar hev ye got thar?" he surlily demanded.

"He's an egregious man-eater," mildly replied Nevermiss.

"He'd better not te'ch me. Ef he does he'll get a bullet through his ugly head."

"Mister, ef you let Moses alone he won't te'ch you; ef you molest him, he's sure ter chaw ye inter fiddle-strings, an' ef he can't do it, I'll help him!" answered Yank, in a matter-of-fact manner.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Griffin. "My friend was only joking, of course. I won't have you two quarrel. What! have a rumpus on an empty stomach? Not by a blamed sight! What say, pards, do we go into the swim with you?"

"We are only passengers on the train," answered Paul, "and you will have to talk with the conductor."

"At any rate, we can help you carry your game. This isn't gold-digging, but our nuggets are buried deep in sand, and this is better for the stomach. Lay hold, my jolly lads!"

The order was obeyed, and the party started for the train. Ballard and Yank did not grow more favorably impressed, and both noticed the fact that the new-comers appeared to be completely subject to Duke Griffin's orders. If they were gold-diggers, Griffin seemed to possess a remarkable degree of authority. However that might be, Griffin acted the part of a blunt, jolly fellow, and, plainly, was no fool.

The train was soon reached.

The arrival of such a large party was a surprise to the passengers, but the supply of game was the best recommendation they could have had to the average passenger. These exiles, too, not pausing to look below the surface, hailed the presence of such hardy men of the hills as a good omen, and they crowded around while Griffin, after being introduced to Peters by Central Pacific Paul, told his story.

"We're gold-diggers, one and all," explained Griffin in his peculiar, airy way. "Gold is our object, and the virgin soil must give it to us. These hills have done well, and we would have come out with our pockets well filled, but this infernal flood knocked us out. It swept twenty feet of solid sand down into the gulch we were working, and under that sand is the gold we had dug, the gold we hoped to dig, and all our tools. It's a deuced hard set-back, but we're game to the backbone. If I flunk my name isn't Duke Griffin! We're on our way to the nearest settlement to buy fresh tools, and we'll have our gold again or bu'st. Set that down as a fact."

On the outskirts of the crowd of passengers stood Garret Jeffreys and Jake Blade, in a highly elated mood. The latter punched his leader in the ribs.

"Ain't Griffin a dandy?" he asked.

"He ain't no fool," Jeffreys admitted.

"Should say not. Wal, Cap, the boys are now hyar—when do we wade in an' sack the train?"

"Go slow, Jake, go slow!" the wrecker chief advised. "We ain't fools enough ter wade in now an' make an open fight with the odds against us, but the train is ours as sure as fate!"

CHAPTER X.

VAUGHAN'S ENCOUNTER.

LUTHER PETERS did not like the appearance of Griffin and his alleged gold-diggers. The conductor had not served the Central Pacific Railroad all these years without learning to read men well, and though he was sensible enough to mentally admit that he was liable to err, he thought that the manners of the new-comers were a trifle too free-and-easy to please him. He could not prove that they were not miners, but his will was good to ask them to make their camp elsewhere.

Not so with the passengers. They hailed the coming of Griffin and his friends as very fortunate. Here were a dozen strong, hardy, willing men who were well-acquainted with the country—what better allies could be found?

Outspoken were the passengers on this point, and Peters found that he could only prevent dissatisfaction among his followers by taking in the strangers. Determined not to shoulder the responsibility wholly himself, he put it to a vote.

Almost every passenger voted in the affirmative, while the few who did not approve of the step remained silent. There was not a negative vote, and the "gold-diggers" were duly admitted to the fold.

Jeffreys and Blade were exultant. They did not at once venture to go near any of the new-comers, for they would do nothing to injure

future hopes. Griffin had used his wits and appeared with a very plausible story, and it was necessary to keep up the pretense and let him figure as he had begun. Nothing could suit Jeffreys better. He was not without fears that he would be recognized, and was glad to keep in the background. Griffin was less known, and was the man to appear at the front. Everything looked favorable—the train-wreckers were on the scene, and the robbery of the passengers was only a matter of time.

Dan Hopper had rejoined Jeffreys and Blade. He had not come in with Griffin and the others, but had arrived slyly and assumed his own position as a modest, honest passenger. He told how he had found the band and brought the men, but did not dilate on the journey. He admitted that it had been one of constant danger, and there he rested his case.

Lieutenant Griffin found one question put to him by the anxious passengers. Could they make a detour and get to the nearest town on foot? And Griffin promptly declared that they could not. They might penetrate ten miles north, but that would only take them into a wilder part of the hills. Go west or east they could not until the flood abated.

The wreckers mixed freely with the passengers, but they had received positive orders before they came and no offensive familiarity was to be noticed. On the other hand, their conduct was such that they were generally regarded as jolly, honest fellows whom it was good to have around.

After breakfast Jeffreys managed to get speech secretly with Griffin.

"I'm right glad to see you here," the chief asserted.

"We had a deuce of a time getting here, though," Griffin answered. "I thought every one of us would break his neck, or be drowned, making the trip."

"Where is Ursula?"

"I persuaded her not to come, though she was ready enough to brave the danger."

"My gal ain't a coward!" declared Jeffreys, with considerable pride.

"No; she's inherited all her father's pluck. We left her alone, but she said she would join us soon."

"The wreck failed, Duke."

"I should say so."

"What do you think o' the chances?"

"I'm ready to wade in and fight whenever you say so."

"I don't say it now," quickly answered Jeffreys. "I ain't goin' ter risk a fight on equal grounds. The passengers outnumber us tremendously, an' though we might do them a good 'eal o' damage, we should stan' a poor show of gettin' plunder."

"I take it you have a plan, Cap?"

"I have. Somethin' may turn up, but in all probability we've got ter wait until night. The train is sure ter be here then, an' when everybody is asleep we'll strike. See?"

"Yes."

"What do ye think o' the plan?"

"I reckon it will work."

"We should be blamed fools ter let this chance slip; it never 'll happen ag'in in our lifetime."

"I should say not."

"We'll plunder it the best we can. Anybody that is sensible an' lets us have our own way will not be in danger, but ef the fools resist, their blood will be on their own hands. Thar is one female hyar I reckon I may carry off when we retreat. Her name is Leonice Ross, an' she is as pretty as a peach."

"Aha! case of Cupid, et al., eh?"

"Hang your high-flown words!" growled Jeffreys. "All I know is that she pleases my eye, an' I reckon a second Mrs. J. would make me a happier man."

"Ursula might object."

"I'm proud o' my gal, Griffin, but she don't want ter interfere with my plans. By the way, thar is a woman with the little Ross that might take your eye. Her name is Pulaski, an' she's right good-lookin'. They're in the second car for'ard; go through an' take a look at her. My charmer wears a jaunty bat with a smart dash o' red in the trimmin's, an' Pulaski has a black hat with a dash o' green tucked on in front."

This vivid description caused Griffin to smile.

"I'll have a look at them," he replied.

"You'd better go now. Keep the lads under good control. Don't let 'em speak ter me, nor to Blade or Hopper, an' don't let 'em drink. Keep the good opinion o' the passengers, or I'll butcher the man who breaks over. If we are wise, there is rich plunder ahead o' us."

Griffin promised, and then sauntered away.

He had re-entered the crowd of passengers, when he came face to face with one of the party who, having been engaged elsewhere, had not up to that time distinctly seen any of the new-comers. This individual was Hubert Vaughan. The two met, but while Vaughan was to Griffin only one out of many, the latter was to Vaughan an object of curiosity. Griffin did not notice the man whom he met at all, but the same could not be said of Vaughan.

He looked sharply at the lieutenant, impelled

by curiosity, but his composed look suddenly fled.

He stopped short, a look which was almost one of alarm appeared on his face, and then the color retreated from his cheeks.

Griffin passed on, unconscious of the disturbance he had caused, while Vaughan remained looking after him. Doubt, surprise and confusion were expressed in that gaze, but as the wrecker lieutenant turned around, a few yards away, he was once more brought into plain view. Doubt vanished from Vaughan's face, and in its place appeared a look which transformed that quiet traveler.

He was no bravo whose first thought was of bloodshed and the weapons necessary to secure it, but on his pale face was a stern, menacing look which told its story. He had seen a familiar face; the face of a man who, he believed, had wronged him bitterly; and Duke Griffin had one enemy in that party whom he could in no way win over to his side.

Vaughan had recognized him as the man who had gone away with Margaret Roland on the train, the day that the great lawsuit had been tried and lost. Vaughan had made no idle boast when he told Madam Pulaski that he should recognize the stranger if they ever met again.

Little did he then expect to meet him so soon, but there he unquestionably was.

Vaughan would have been more than human if he had not regarded the new arrival with suspicion. Margaret was there, and it seemed too great a chance that all three parties to the old drama should meet in that wild place without some previous calculation. It certainly seemed absurd, for how could Griffin have known of the situation of the train? but there are times when suspicion is as natural as the drawing of one's breath.

"I will watch him," Vaughan thought, darkly. "If he knows that Margaret is here he will soon seek her, and I will have proof one way or the other."

He pressed one hand to his aching head.

"I have seen him at last," he muttered, "and now what am I going to do about it? I have always thought that I would scorn to do him bodily injury, and I think so now. Why should I commit a crime, and get into trouble, for such persons as these? Heaven knows they have injured me enough. If Margaret told the truth when she said that she did not betray me to the rival lawyers, then it was assuredly Duke Griffin who did. Haven't I cause to hate him?"

Vaughan clinched his hands tightly. A storm of anger and hatred was burning within him which was hard to subdue, but he met it bravely and gave no sign to those about him.

Gradually he grew calmer.

"Perhaps it would be best to let them alone, but I want to settle one question; I want to see them meet. I will continue to watch Griffin."

He did so, and at the end of half an hour there were signs that he would be gratified. The wrecker lieutenant rose from the log where he had been sitting, looked around with what seemed careless indifference, and then sauntered toward one of the cars. It was that where Vaughan believed Margaret to be.

He moved toward the other end of the car, took position on the platform and awaited the result.

He saw Madam Pulaski, but she was talking with Leonice, Whiting and Arlington and was to all appearances oblivious to what was occurring around her. Griffin entered the car. As will be suspected he was looking for the two ladies described by Garrett Jeffreys, and was unconscious of the surprise which awaited him.

Vaughan opened the door at the end of the car enough so that he could overhear whatever was said.

Griffin came slowly along the passage. Nearly every seat was occupied, and he had to pick out those he sought. He neared the middle of the car. The quartette there did not notice him until he was nearly beside them. Then Madam Pulaski looked up.

She and Griffin saw each other.

The lieutenant stopped short—he had found more than he had bargained for. It did not need the dash of green in Margaret's hat for him to recognize her. Old acquaintances had met, and if it was not a complete surprise their acting was good.

Griffin's face grew blank and he gazed at her stupidly, while on her part she uttered a faint cry and then shrunk back with the same pallor on her face which Leonice had seen when Hubert Vaughan appeared. Judge Whiting heard the cry, saw her emotion and looked up angrily and suspiciously.

The silence was broken by Griffin. In his surprise he forgot prudence and the claims which Garrett Jeffreys had upon him, and he acted upon the impulse of the moment.

"My dear Margaret!" he exclaimed, "what freak of fortune sent you here? By Judas! I would as soon have thought of seeing an angel, but you are very welcome. Give me your hand!"

And his own hand was extended confidently toward her.

Margaret, however, sat like a statue; she made no movement until Griffin tried to take

the hand she did not offer; and then she again recoiled.

Whiting arose in all his dignity.

"Sir," he stiffly exclaimed, "what do you mean by this rude conduct?"

Griffin ignored him.

"Who would have thought of seeing you here, Margaret?" he continued. "I hope you have not had much trouble in finding me? Come aside, and let us talk."

He again essayed to take her hand.

"Let me alone!" she gasped.

"Do you hear?" thundered the judge. "Your presence is distasteful to this lady. Move on, or you will regret it!"

Griffin stepped back a pace and surveyed Whiting from head to foot with a cool, contemptuous glance which is the height of insolence.

"Hal-lo!" he returned, slowly and sneeringly, "who resurrected this Egyptian mummy?"

Whiting's face flushed and he made a forward movement, but with a sweep of his arm, which was more of a push than a blow, the wrecker flung him back into the seat.

CHAPTER XI.

GRIFFIN SHOWS HIS POWER.

HEBER ARLINGTON spring to his feet, revolver in hand. In the wild life he had led as gambler and sharper he had learned to rely wholly upon that weapon in all altercations, and though he had acted a passive part since he and Whiting took charge of Leonice, he thought it time to interfere now.

An ordinary man would have fared badly just then, but Arlington had a match in Duke Griffin. The wrecker had expected something of the kind, and was prepared for it. He swung his arm again, and, striking Arlington's wrist sharply, sent the revolver flying across the car.

"That will do!" he sharply exclaimed. "Let me alone now, or there will be a coroner's inquest right away!"

Whiting looked at him in impotent rage.

"You scoundrel!" he gasped, "I will have the law of you!"

"Take it right away."

"Eh?"

"Settle it right off. If you have any grudge, let us find out immediately who is the best man."

"I am not a cut-throat."

Griffin laughed mockingly.

"Don't let that stop you; I'll take all the damage you can do. If there is anybody hurt it won't be me."

"I shall complain to the conductor."

"Much good it will do; he don't control me. Even if he did, who began this row? It was not me. I addressed a lady whom I know, and you put in your big mouth right off; you may think yourself lucky that there is anything left of you. I want to speak to this lady—have you or your revolver friend anything to say against it?"

Vainly trying to control his anger, the judge turned to Madam Pulaski.

"Do you know this man?"

"Answer him, Margaret," said Griffin, smiling.

Hubert Vaughan listened eagerly.

"I know him," Margaret faintly answered.

"To be sure she does," airily answered the wrecker. "Old friends, and good, are we. I won't say we were children together, but we met further on, and few persons have found each other so congenial as we."

"The lady is not glad to see you," growled Whiting, who was still in an ugly mood.

"Is that any of your business? Don't try to rule the whole roost because you have one claw on the pole. I will show you that she is willing to do as I say; Margaret will refuse me nothing reasonable."

He turned and looked steadily into her face.

"Will you kindly go to another part of the car and talk with me, Margaret?"

There was the slightest possible hesitation, and then Madam Pulaski rose. Her face was pale and set, and Leonice was startled as she looked into her eyes, but the elder woman followed Griffin without remonstrance. They took a seat some distance away.

Hubert Vaughan smiled bitterly. Here were the two persons who had wrecked all his hopes, and it was in his power to seek revenge if he desired. He did not think of it. No act of his, or theirs, could undo the past, and the best way was to pass them by with silent contempt. Even then he saw a way by which he could listen and, probably, overhear what they were about to say, but he would not act the part. He assured himself that he did not care. As for Margaret, he believed that Time had become his avenger. She was not happy; she seemed to shrink from Griffin; and it was just as well to let them alone.

He resolutely left the car, and met Central Pacific Paul and Yank Yellowbird a few yards away.

"Is there no chance of getting out of this trap?" Vaughan abruptly asked.

"Our new recruits say it is impossible," Ballard replied.

"Have you such confidence in them?"

"I did not say I had confidence in them, though Yank and I learned while out hunting that this temporary river extends well to the north. Possibly the men of our party could get through, but not the ladies."

"I believe I shall try."

"May I ask why?"

"I am tired of this monotony."

"Have you important business to call you away?"

"No."

"Then I wish you would remain."

Vaughan noticed that Paul's manner was grave.

"Why so?"

"You spoke rather slightly of our new recruits, the self-styled miners. What is your opinion of them?"

"I haven't the best of opinions, but I have no good reason for thinking ill of them."

"I believe your opinion is correct," the detective earnestly replied. "Yank Yellowbird and I share it. We look upon these men with suspicion. They do not strike me as being honest miners, and the fact that so many hard characters are to be found all through this region is recalled by the free-and-easy, lawless air of Duke Griffin and his friends. I have taken pains to see if their hands show signs of having used pick and spade, and I find them as smooth and soft as those of a man of leisure."

Vaughan's resentment against Duke Griffin made him very ready to receive the impression these words conveyed.

"They seem revealed as impostors, at the least," he returned, "and it would not surprise me if they were rascals."

"They're atrocious insex!" declared Yank, striking the barrel of his rifle. "I'm a man beset with newrolgy, an' I've got a foot that's a weak sister, but my mental faculties ain't at all clouded. All the Yellowbirds have a knack fur readin' human natur', an' they hate scamps like the mischief. I tell ye them strangers are bad medicine."

"You hear, Mr. Vaughan, the opinion of a man who has seen many years of experience in the West, and who has been thrown into the company of lawless men in many different localities."

"By sarcumstances," amended the mountaineer. "I don't take ter them nat'rally, but when we do meet I don't run. The fam'ly pedigree shows all the Yellowbirds adverse ter runnin'."

"Perhaps you see now why I ask you not to leave our party," added Central Pacific Paul. "There may be trouble here, and every honest man is needed."

"Enough," answered Vaughan; "I will stay. I put myself unreservedly under your command, and beg that you will direct me."

"There is nothing to be done at present, except to watch and listen. If Griffin and his men mean mischief, they will hardly venture to break over to-day; it is during the coming night that we need to use all vigilance."

"You see," added Yank, "the new recruits ain't the only ones who are open ter suspicion. Thar are them among the passengers who look as though they would enjoy some mighty mean things. I consait a man ain't ter blame fur the face natur' gives him, but if he's so mean it creeps out an' stamps his face, it's our duty ter see it."

Some further conversation took place, but both Yank and the detective said that nothing could be done just then except to wait and watch. Even if the suspected men were villains of the worst kind, they would hardly venture on any hostile move during the day, for the numbers of the passengers would offset their superiority in the way of weapons.

Central Pacific Paul wandered away, and, standing on the brink of the torrent that was flowing across the track, considered it critically. He was as anxious as the conductor to see the train move on. Owing to the peculiar line of his duties, all his interests, in a professional sense, were centered in the railroad.

He and Peters were equally interested in rescuing the train and its passengers from the present plight.

He wandered several rods to the north, but could find no place where a crossing could be made. The water came down from the higher ground with a boisterous sweep and dash, and was churned to a foam on the rocks by the way. The newly-started river showed no signs of abating, while the angry-looking clouds indicated that more rain was about to fall.

He was thus engaged when he heard some one moving near him. He turned and saw—Leonice Ross.

It was a surprise to him, for she seemed to be entirely alone, but he was not sorry to see her. Strange, indeed, would it have been had he been sorry. She had never looked prettier. Evidently she had been hurrying over the rough ground, and her cheeks were flushed to the most becoming pink imaginable.

All men pay homage to beauty, let them deny it however stoutly, and Ballard gracefully lifted his hat.

"Good-morning, Miss Ross," he said.

"Good-morning, sir," she answered, with charming doubt and confusion. "I hope I am not intruding—"

"Not in the least; I am glad to see you."

"I don't think I have thanked you properly for frightening the robber away from the sleeping-car last night. I tried to do so, but I was frightened then myself."

"You thanked me fully, Miss Ross, and I am glad to have been of service to you."

"Have you any idea who the robber was?"

"No. The stupidity of the porter ruined the last chance."

"I wanted to talk with you about—"

Leonice paused. She seemed to find it hard to say what was in her mind, but after a brief hesitation she went on with increased firmness:

"I understand that you are a detective, sir."

"Who told you that?"

"I overheard one man say to another that you were 'Central Pacific Paul, the railroad detective.' Not being a Western, or a business person, I will frankly confess that I have never heard of you, but I am glad that you are such a man. I don't know as that is very clear," she doubtfully added.

"Why are you glad?"

"First, tell me if you are a detective?"

"I do not like to be widely known, since it would interfere with my business, but such is the fact. My name is Paul Ballard, and men sometimes call me Central Pacific Paul—indeed, few who know me as a detective know my real name."

"I want to ask information of you, Mr. Ballard."

"I will hear your question."

"You don't promise to answer, I see."

"Which does not mean that I shall refuse," replied Paul, smiling. "Very likely, however, I shall be ready to answer."

"You shall have the chance," returned Leonice, suddenly growing grave. "You have seen those with whom I am traveling; it was you who took the revolver away from Heber Arlington. Now, I would like to hear what you know about them."

She paused and looked attentively, critically at Ballard. Her manner had grown earnest and serious, and it was plain that no ordinary curiosity prompted the question. Had she begun to doubt her companions?

CHAPTER XII.

LEONICE MAKES TROUBLE.

CENTRAL PACIFIC PAUL hesitated before he replied. He did not know to what these remarks tended, and though he was ready to aid Leonice in all reasonable ways, he foresaw that trouble might arise from this interview and he was not in position to meet it satisfactorily to himself.

"Surely, you ought to know more about your traveling companions than I do," he replied.

"I know next to nothing," Leonice answered.

"That is singular."

"I had never seen one of them until a few weeks ago. When my father died he appointed Judge Whiting, an old friend of his, as my guardian. The judge had been many years on the Pacific Coast, but he came East at once, bringing Heber Arlington with him. Madam Pulaski was an old friend of the judge's, and he selected her as my companion. I never had a doubt of them until last night. I liked them, for they were friendly and sociable, and I had almost led the life of a nun, so retired and dull was the history of my past. Still, they were, and are, almost strangers to me. Last night I heard singular charges against them, made by Mr. Hubert Vaughan. You must know of those charges, for you are his friend. I want you to tell me."

Leonice had spoken rapidly, and her voice and manner were firm. Had Madam Pulaski seen her then she would have seen evidences of a strong character not before suspected.

This firmness did not reassure Ballard.

"What do you want to know?" he uneasily asked.

"Mr. Vaughan's note stated that Heber Arlington, whom Judge Whiting introduced to me as an honorable man, was, really, a gambler known as 'Blonde Pete.' Is this true?"

Ballard hesitated.

"I hope," Leonice added, "that you would not refuse information to a helpless girl."

"Heaven forbid! Arlington is 'Blonde Pete.' I have known him for years. He is, like a good many of his class, a roving person. Nobody ever knows where to find him. One week he may fleece a Denver man at cards; the next he may be in St. Louis, Bismarck, Leadville or any one of a dozen other places; and as a gambler he is widely known."

"You are sure of this?"

"I am."

"Go on! What of Judge Whiting?"

"I know absolutely nothing about him."

"Does Mr. Vaughan?"

"No."

"He said in his note that of my other companions 'at least one was a dangerous person.'"

"I do not think he referred to—"

Paul paused, but Leonice spoke quickly:

"To Mr. Whiting? Do you mean that you think he referred to Madam Pulaski?"

"I really cannot say, but he distinctly told me that he knew nothing about Whiting. I have suspected that he may have knowledge of Madam Pulaski, but he has not confided anything to me."

"He has knowledge of her; I saw them when they met, without previous warning to each other, and they were agitated and startled. More than that they must have been on ill terms, for Mr. Vaughan went on without even a word of greeting to her. Yet—she spoke well of him, and said that no worthy person need be afraid of him. I don't understand it; I find it hard to think ill of Madam Pulaski. She seems to me to be a noble woman."

Ballard did not answer, and after a period of meditation Leonice added:

"I like her very much; she seemed to be a true, kind woman; but there are things I can't forget. At times she acts as though she would like to disobey Whiting, but dares not. I have been blind to all this, but a suspicion grows fast when once started. Again one of the miners came along a short time ago—a wild, reckless fellow—and claimed her acquaintance, and though she was terrified, she did not deny the acquaintance. Then he had a quarrel with Arlington, and revolvers were drawn."

The girl paused, shivered, and then exclaimed:

"And have I cast my lot among such desperadoes?—among men who gamble, and who draw weapons at the least trouble?"

"I hope, at the least, they mean you well," Paul replied.

"Mr. Ballard, I want your advice!" Leonice forcibly added.

"I will help you all I can, gladly."

"It may seem strange that I come to you for advice, but what other friend have I? I can see only you and the conductor. True, you are both strangers to me, but your official positions seem to promise protection, and my terrible dilemma drives me to the frank statement that your face seems that of a man a friendless girl may trust."

"Miss Ross," quickly replied the detective, "you may trust me as freely as you would your brother, and may I be dealt with as I deal with you?"

"Thank you—I felt sure I could rely upon you," she said, gratefully.

"At the same time, I do not see how I can give you any news as to Whiting, at present. He is unknown to me; I never heard of him until yesterday."

"I do not want you to act rashly, nor do I think it necessary for me to antagonize him at present."

"You might, if you think best, continue in his company; and, at some favorable point, telegraph on ahead and see how he is regarded by those who know him."

"My idea, exactly, but whom shall I telegraph to?"

"Don't you know any one in his town?"

"No."

"Have you heard him speak of the place?"

"Oh! yes."

"Has he mentioned any clergyman, or police official?"

Leonice shook her head gravely.

"No."

"Where there is a will there is a way. Surely there must be a post-office?"

"Yes; I have heard him mention that."

"And you are going through to San Francisco?"

"Yes."

"Then I advise you to telegraph to the postmaster of the town where Whiting lives, asking him to send the name of a local minister, and also that of the sheriff, or some officer. Have the answer sent to the San Francisco hotel where you are to stop, if you know where that is—"

"I do."

"Very well then; once this information is in your possession, you can telegraph for news of Whiting."

"Do you want an agent in the case, Miss Ross?"

The last words sounded unexpectedly to Paul and Leonice, and they turned quickly. Heber Arlington stood before them. A mocking, triumphant smile was upon the gambler's lips, but back of that was an expression which told that he was in a condition of great anger.

"I am glad to find that you know how to amuse yourself during your idle moments, Miss Ross," he added, "and I must say that you have the art of flirtation down fine. The only doubt is, would Judge Whiting approve of the free use you have made of his name?"

Ballard saw that Leonice was too much confused to reply, and he quickly retorted:

"I suppose every one must approve of your conduct in acting the spy and listener."

"Especially this foolish child's guardian," Arlington coolly replied.

"You seem proud of your infamy."

"How's that, sir?"

"You heard me plainly enough."

"I did, and I am wondering if you want to be chastised."

"You will never do it," contemptuously answered the detective. "You and I met in the car, as you may remember, and I have a vague recollection of seeing you upon your knees. Moreover, you will remember that I whispered a secret in your ear."

"You may shout it abroad if you see fit," sullenly answered Arlington. "I am not going to be bullied by you. This young lady is, in a measure, under my care, and you are not wanted here. Take yourself off!"

"Miss Ross shall decide whether I go or stay," steadily declared Ballard.

Leonice was recovering her self-possession, and she quickly exclaimed:

"I say stay!"

"Beware!" cried Arlington.

"Of what, sir?"

"Judge Whiting shall hear of this."

"Tell him, if you wish."

"And of the plot you have formed to injure his reputation. Be careful that you do not get yourself into trouble."

"Enough of that!" sternly interrupted Central Pacific Paul. "You shall not threaten a lady in my presence."

"I shall do as I please!" declared Arlington.

"You are wrong, as I will convince you. We will not stay here to listen to you. Miss Ross, shall I conduct you back to the train?"

"I shall be glad to have you, sir."

Arlington stepped between them.

"No, you don't!" he coarsely exclaimed.

"Stand out of my path!" ordered Ballard, in a low but impressive voice.

He advanced as he spoke, but Arlington, instead of moving away, aimed a blow at the detective. The act destroyed the last remnant of the detective's patience. He caught the descending arm, seized the gambler's shoulder with his other hand, and with a quick movement flung Arlington heavily to the ground. The shock was a severe one, but the fallen man was up again in a moment. His head was clear enough for a storm of rage to be working within him, and his hand sought his ever-ready revolver.

"Stop!" sharply ordered Ballard.

The gambler saw a shining revolver menacing him.

"Don't dare to draw a weapon!" added Paul, in his former tone; "you will do it at your peril. I have borne all from you that I will, and now that you have forced me to resort to a revolver in the presence of a lady, you have reached the limit. Bear this in mind!"

Arlington stood pale with anger.

"You shall answer for this!" he said, huskily.

"Sut yourself."

"I will. You have insulted and assailed me, and no cave of earth or air shall hide you from my vengeance."

"Rest assured; I shall not hide—above all, not in a 'cave of the air,' whatever that is."

"I will see you again."

"Thank you."

"As for you, miss," and Arlington turned to Leonice, "Judge Whiting shall hear of this."

"That will do!" peremptorily interrupted Paul. "You shall not threaten the lady. Miss Ross, there are signs of more rain; shall I escort you to the train?"

Leonice had been deeply agitated by the late encounter, but she managed to answer firmly:

"I shall be pleased to have you do so, Mr. Ballard."

They went quietly. Paul watched Arlington, but the latter made no hostile demonstration. He did not even speak, but this was because his heart was too full for utterance—too full of bitter, vengeful emotions. He was a man who had long since thrown all wholesome restraint aside; a man of the revolver and the knife; and to such a person humiliation is especially severe.

"I hope no harm will come to you, Mr. Ballard," said Leonice, uneasily.

"Do not fear for me."

"I have made all this trouble by bringing my doubts and sorrows to you, and now you have made an enemy who, I feel sure, will never forgive you."

"He can consult his own pleasure. It is a penalty of my official life to have all such fellows down on me, but I manage to take care of myself. Do not give it a thought. But what of yourself? Arlington will surely carry the story of this encounter to Whiting."

"Let him do it. I am not sure but their enmity is better than their friendship."

Central Pacific Paul knit his brows thoughtfully. He knew better than she what their enmity might mean to her.

CHAPTER XIII.

YANK HAS SUSPICIONS.

"I HAVE one request to make," observed the detective, after a brief pause.

"What is it?" Leonice asked.

"If you have been the cause of trouble between Arlington and me, as you say, I have been the innocent cause of making your position painful with your traveling-companions. Far be it from me to judge Whiting harshly when I can prove nothing against him, but this let

me say: If they annoy you, or new doubts arise, I should be glad to have you come to me as a friend."

"Thank you—thank you very much—and I will do so."

She looked up and met Ballard's gaze. He was a man devoted to a profession in which he worked conscientiously, but he felt a pleasure, then, in becoming the champion of the innocent and persecuted which was new to him. He realized that there was a peculiar satisfaction in being the protector of a young and charming girl. His devotion to his profession was in danger of having a rival, and what business inclination can struggle successfully to rule a man's mind when its rival is a pretty girl?

They went on and soon reached the train. There they separated; Leonice went back to Madam Pulaski, and Ballard walked toward the rear of the train.

He saw Duke Griffin in the center of a group of passengers. The self-styled gold-digger was telling a humorous story, and the others were listening with interest and visible admiration.

The sight did not please Ballard; to his suspicious mind it looked as though Griffin might be working with a fixed purpose to get the good-will of the Overland travelers. They were without suspicion, and perhaps the detective had too much of it; but he intended to protect them whether they were willing or not.

A little further on he found Van T. Stuyvesant Bliss in earnest conversation with Yank Yellowbird.

"I shall be pleased," said the former, "to take down whatever facts you possess. I pride in ancestry is one of the bulwarks of the nation. I am a descendant of three old families—the Van Tromps, the Stuyvesants and the Blisses, and I am glad that your family was early in the country. I shall be pleased to record what you can tell, and they shall be given due space in my book."

"Land o' Goshen! be you goin' ter write a book?" gravely inquired Yank.

"I am, and it will be called 'The United States Historic Genealogical Dictionary.'"

A look of awe overspread the mountaineer's face.

"Do ye think it'll live?" he asked.

"How?"

"With that name hitched on ter it. My third cousin's mother's grandfather had a daughter named Thankful Prosperity Yellowbird, an' she had congestion o' the brain an' died. The doctors said it was the weight of her name on her head did it; but mebbe he was wrong. The other gals was Charity Hopeful, Patience Particler an' Needful Kindness—all Yellowbirds—an' they lived, though Patience had a most egregious bad temper, an' Needful bad corns."

"I am glad you have your family names so ready," replied Bliss, wholly unconscious of Yank's humorous banter. "I will begin your record."

"Will you begin with my gran'father, the Revolutionary relict?" Nevermiss gravely inquired.

"You can tell me of him—"

"Jes' so. I consait thar wa'n't many men his ekul. True, he didn't hev newrolgy ter bother him, like me, an' his left foot wa'n't a coward; but I b'lieve ef he'd had them afflictions, he'd riz superior ter them—I do, by hurley!"

The mountaineer struck his hand upon his rifle-barrel with mild enthusiasm, and looked justly proud of his ancestor.

"His name was—"

"Constant Ebenezer Yellowbird."

"But I—I thought you once told me it was Joshua Nicodemus."

"Not a t'all."

"But I have it here, where I wrote it down at the time."

"Lemme look at it."

Bliss passed over the note-book, and Yank gazed gravely at the record. Then he smiled and shook his head compassionately.

"You're wrong, mister; but 'tain't ter be wondered at. The writin' is egregious poor, an' the names is so much alike that a novice is likely ter make a mistake. The K at the beginnin' o' 'Constant' is condemned shaky in the way it's made, an' does look some like a J, which is the fust letter in Joshua; an' the two words, as I said afore, is a good 'eal alike when put down on paper."

Mr. Bliss did not seem to be greatly pleased by this uncomplimentary comment on his handwriting, but he accepted the criticism and prepared for the next item.

"Whom did your grandfather marry?"

"Nobody; he wa'n't a minister, nor a jestic o' the peace."

"I mean, who was his wife?"

"Her name was Comfort Sally Plummer."

"Their children were named what?"

"There was thirteen on 'em, but they give one away because thirteen was an unlucky number. Anybody knows that who has fed thirteen children. I ain't, fur I'm an old bachelor, as you see, but I had an egregious narrer escape. Actually got engaged ter a gal once, though I acted reckless, ter keep t'other chap from gittin' ahead on me. Arter she had said 'yes,' I sorter considered ter see ef I ree'lly wanted her. Afore

I had decided, we was passin' the parson's house, one day, when she asked me ter go in.

"'I consait I won't,' sez I.

"'Why not?' sez she.

"'I ain't got my whiskers 'iled,' sez I—I was jest startin' out a beard that was soft as hens' feathers, though not so long.

"'Never mind; le's git married,' sez she, insinueratin' like an' tender.

"'Land o' Goshen!' sez I, 'I don't want ter.'

"'You've promised,' sez she, 'an' a Yellowbird never breaks his word.'

"That took me in a weak p'int, an' in I went, though the weak sister hung back—it hung back like hurley, the weak sister did; an' the newrolgy reached my system so I almost yelled right out. Thar wa'n't no pity in her heart, though, an' she toted me in afore the parson. I knowed it was all up with me ef he said over his formula fur sech cases, an' I looked fur a way o' escape. I got out a gold piece, an' sez I: 'I want ter see ye aside, parson,' sez I.

"'Thar ain't no hurry,' sez he, lookin' at the money an' noddin', fur he knowed it was his fee.

"'Thar's a condemn'd big hurry!' sez I, despr'tly, while the sweat oozed out all over me. 'I never run in debt fur anything yit, an' I won't do it fur a wife. Pay now or never,' sez I, winkin' at him on the sly.

"He seen suthin' was up, an' took me ter the next room.

"Parson,' sez I, tremblin' like a leaf, 'ef you've got a mos'sel of human feelin', you'll help me. Hyar's yer fee,' sez I, 'an' now save me from that female woman. Take the money, an' keep her quiet five minutes. The winder ain't only twenty feet from the ground, an' I kin jump out, an' then I'll run like hurley. I defy any woman,' sez I, 'ter ketch me ef I turn my face west an' git a fair start. Ef she marries me, it'll be your fault, parson, an' you'll hev an atrocious big sin ter answer fur!'

"Wal, ter cut the story short, the parson wa'n't a bad feller. He said he'd do it; I jumped out o' the winder; an' though the gal got arter me inside fifteen minutes, I made good my escape. I lit out fur the prairies an' ain't got married yit, though, as a rule, I've been mortal popular among the female sect."

Yank's story flowed on with the quiet, genial utterance and dry humor which was peculiar to him in his peaceful moments. Central Pacific Paul, who knew that these alleged reminiscences were only whimsical fictions on the part of the tall mountaineer, listened with a smile, while even Bliss forgot his hobby and paid admiration to Yank's genial good-humor.

Just then a fourth person passed them, and Yank's brows contracted sharply.

"Thar's a chap I don't like," he asserted.

The object of his remarks was Garrett Jeffreys.

"Nor I," Paul agreed.

"D'ye know him?"

"No, though his face seems a trifle familiar."

"Don't fancy him!" quoth Yank, stroking his beard thoughtfully. "Sech chaps as he are common 'round in these parts. He's got a mortal lot o' muskle, an' that I like; but it's a bad face—an egregious bad face. I hev my suspicions o' him. The Yellowbirds all hev a knack o' findin' out rascals; it sorter runs in the pedigree. Our fam'ly records state that the father o' Adam Yellowbird—him who lived at the Garden o' Eden—was a detective in the days when Pontifex Pilate an' Benedict Arnold was the two selectmen o' Rome, an' when Adam's father—his name was Zadoc—seen a man he didn't like, he arrested him on suspicion. The selectmen backed him up, too, an' the pris'ners was took to the guillotine an' hung without trial. My ancestor never lost a case."

Van T. Stuyvesant Bliss looked bewildered, but just then rain began to fall again and there was a hurried retreat to the cars. Paul and Yank sat down together.

"There is one man whom I wish to make my ally and confidant in the full sense of the word," said Ballard.

"To be sure," Yank answered.

"He is a veteran mountaineer who is said to know the Northwest as the scholar knows his book. He is a valuable ally in all cases, for he is quiet and can keep a secret. He never seeks a quarrel, and is never known to act the part of a noisy braggart, but is ever ready to aid the cause of Right, and when he is forced into battle he is a lion in his wrath."

"A strong recommend," dryly answered the elder man.

"Some persons call him 'Nevermiss.' You know whom I mean. There, friend Yank, I will respect your modesty and come to the point. I don't like these alleged gold-seekers, and the idea grows upon me that they came here with a settled purpose. We have lawless men around here, mountaineer."

"Jes' so. I pass most o' my time funder north, but what few times I've b'en through here I've always seen characters o' dubious looks an', I consait, sealy pedigree."

"And our gold-seekers belong to that class?"

"I admit I've had my suspicions."

"Exactly. Now, Nevermiss, these men, good or bad as they may be, need watching. I know that your eyes are of the keenest sort, and I

want your active aid. I have spoken to you of this before, but, you see, I am speaking again. Now, shall we form an alliance?"

"Ef you wish."

"I do wish it."

"Then I'm with ye, an' we'll take keer o' the gold-diggers."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE JUDGE MAKES A DEMAND.

AT that moment Peters, the conductor, entered the car at the front end and walked slowly back. He was near Ballard and Yank when the detective saw Judge Whiting step forward and confront the railroad man.

"Excuse me, conductor," said Whiting politely, "but I would like a word with you."

"Certainly," Peters replied. "Proceed!"

"I want that man arrested."

"The pacific voice grew hard, and Whiting pointed directly to Paul Ballard."

"Hallo! what's the trouble?" asked the conductor.

"The man is a villain!"

"My dear sir, you are from the East, ain't you?"

"I am, sir."

"I thought so when you used the word 'villain.' It was reckless of you. It is a fighting word East, while here in the West—why, man, he who uses it is liable to cause a six-shooter to be emptied at his own expense. You may call yourself lucky that the alleged 'villain' sits there so quietly."

"Do you take his part?" sharply demanded Whiting.

"We will see. Why do you want him arrested?"

"He has conducted himself outrageously. I am traveling with a quiet party of personal friends. Among them is a young lady, and this man—I think his name is Ballard—has bewitched her. He has led her to rebel against her best friends, and disturbed the pleasant relations existing in our party."

"Am I to 'arrest' him for that?"

"I want him put under restraint."

"What offense against law has he committed?"

"Is it nothing that a lawless character travels on a train, forces himself into the company of peaceable passengers and makes their life almost unendurable?"

"Has Ballard done this to the young lady?"

The question was a trap, but Whiting did not fall into it.

"He has done it to me," was the reply.

"What has he done?"

"Turned Miss Ross against me and her other friends," sharply answered the judge.

"I will hear the complaint of Miss Ross."

"Don't you understand that she will make none? Ballard has turned her head, and alienated her confidence from us."

"Can you specify any lawless act on his part?"

Whiting thought of the scene in the car when Central Pacific Paul had wrested the revolver away from Arlington, but he was only too glad to have that dropped.

"Isn't it enough that he has interfered with my party?" he asked, in a surly voice.

"I don't think it is, for I fail to see that any misdemeanor has been committed. Even if I were a sheriff, I could not arrest a man for nothing. Of course no man will be allowed to annoy a lady, but I don't see that it has been done in this case. As for the gentleman you speak against, I have known Mr. Ballard five years, and I know him to be what I just called him—a gentleman."

Whiting's face flushed.

"I see there is no justice on this train!" he angrily said.

"And I, sir, will take care that there is no injustice," firmly replied Peters.

Ballard spoke for the first time.

"Judge Whiting is mistaken when he says that I have annoyed his party, and he need fear nothing if his conscience is clear."

"What do you mean by that?" blustered the judge.

"Simply what I said."

"I perceive that you want to fasten a quarrel upon me."

"You perceive nothing of the kind, except where you are the aggressor. You have complained of one passenger annoying another—what is to be said of your conduct in stopping here to insult and annoy me?"

"That's logic," agreed Peters.

"Egregious wal put," added Nevermiss.

"I see you are all against me," angrily answered Whiting, "and I will waste no more words now, but I shall report this conductor at the office, when we get out of this villainous fix!" And with this parting shot he stalked away.

Yank Yellowbird, Ballard and Vaughan were together nearly all the time. Once Van T. Stuyvesant Bliss appeared with his note-book and opened a genealogical inquiry, but neither Ballard nor Vaughan was communicative as to his ancestors. Bliss, however, still had hopes of Yank. Even his credulity had been severely tested by the mountaineer's whimsical statements, but Bliss was sanguine, earnest and

simple, and he was ambitious to have a private interview with the man who had his ancestors so well marshaled in his mind.

He had set his heart upon having one chapter of "The United States Historic Genealogical Dictionary" devoted to the Yellowbirds, and was not to be discouraged.

One striking fact was observed during the afternoon—Heber Arlington and Duke Griffin were seen in close, earnest and secret conversation. Following as it did so soon after their trouble in the car, when Griffin accosted Madam Pulaski, this was significant and suspicious.

Just before dark there was another cessation of rain, but night closed in damp, dark and disagreeable. There was nothing to show that help was near, and the temper of the passengers had grown as bad as the state of the weather.

Ballard, Peters and their confidants were still without evidence that Griffin and his followers meant mischief. The "gold-seekers" remained as agreeable as ever, and if they had treacherous designs they masked them well.

It was nearly nine o'clock when Yank Yellowbird went outside. Of all the captive travelers he, in one sense, felt the inactivity the most. His was an active life, and the restraint of any kind of in-door life was obnoxious and tiresome. His home and his sympathies were alike among the mountains and on the prairies, and the wilder the place, the more he liked it. The bold front of bowlder and cliff; the beauty and rest of the summer forest; the mellow music of the rivers and the silent majesty of the lakes; the wide stretches of prairie where pure air was abundant and no restraints burdened his movements—these were the things which made him pay homage to the wide, wild Northwest.

His will had been good enough to leave the train and, accompanied only by his dog, take to the hills, but Ballard had enlisted him and he remained.

Having left the car, on this occasion, he walked toward the rear of the train. He paused for a moment, and something touched his leg. He looked down and saw his dog. He laid his hand upon the shaggy head.

"Good Moses!" he murmured. "You want a word with me I consait. Ef so, speak out. To be sure; to be sure. What you say is right. This life is egregious dull, an' it sorter wears on us. How's that, Moses? We want the wild life o' the mountains ag'in'. Moses, you never spoke a truer word; we do hanker for it like the mischief. Land o' Goshen, yes! Never mind, dog, we ain't sentenced fur life ter this sort o' thing. I pity a man sarvin' a life-sentence, away from the sky, an' the air, an' the sunshine, I do by burley!"

The mountaineer removed his battered fur cap and looked up at the heavy clouds. Dark as they were, they made an agreeable contrast to prison-walls.

"It's the only proper place fur atrocious in-sex, though," he added, "fur they desearve it, an' honest folks can't be made miser'ble just ter make rascals happy. You see the p'int, don't ye, Moses?"

The dog's tail vibrated briskly. Yank frequently carried on the pretense of talking with him, but Moses's expressions of opinion were limited to the sign-language.

Nevermiss walked on until he was abreast the rear car. He was on ground higher than the road-bed, and as he turned his head the interior of the car was plainly visible. He saw something which brought him to a sudden stop.

Since the train had been at a standstill no one had taken the trouble to hold a certain seat—indeed, an occasional change was a relief in that it brought new associations—and a peculiar state of affairs was visible in the rear car.

Every person there was of the masculine gender, and as Yank's gaze wandered from face to face he saw that it was a hard-looking collection. Almost every other face was that of one of Duke Griffin's men, and their companions were the worst-looking of the passengers.

The mountaineer frowned, and his fingers worked mechanically on the barrel of his long rifle. He did not like the collection of men there visible. Could it be that chance, alone, had drawn them together?

CHAPTER XV.

THE REAR CAR.

"Down, dog!" muttered Yank, touching the head of his shaggy friend. "Hyar's summut worth watchin', I consait, an' we mustn't git ketched at it. Mebbe we'll both git the jumpin' newrolgy like hurley from the wet ground, but we shall hev to bear up under it."

Resting one arm upon Moses mechanically, Yank crouched close to the earth. The dog's instinct told him that the experiences of the prairie and forest were being renewed in a measure, and his gaze followed the same course as his master's, while his aspect grew savage and menacing.

The men in the car were not so quiet as they had been. They were talking and laughing loudly, and all seemed to be in the best of spirits. Nevermiss shook his head. There had been among the passengers some villainous-looking

wretches—worse than the train-wreckers, because they were not so well dressed nor so well fed—and now that they were mixed with Griffin's followers, the combination was striking, as well as lawless and unprepossessing.

The mountaineer saw Griffin in conversation with the black-bearded man he had some time before given a poor opinion of—Garrett Jeffreys.

Yank watched closely, and soon noticed a peculiar state of affairs. The manner of the men was very dissimilar. He of the black beard was doing the talking, and his air was that of one exacting respect and obedience, while Griffin, quiet and respectful, was paying the required homage without the least sign of annoyance.

Nevermiss had seen enough of the relations of superior and inferior to make this scene very suspicious to him, and his gaze dwelt upon Garrett Jeffreys's face with studious attention.

Another bit of evidence was soon vouchsafed him.

On the further side of the car one of the "gold-diggers" was acting boisterously, his voice rising above all others. Jeffreys finally fixed a stern gaze upon him, and then rapped on the arm of the seat with the butt of a revolver.

Every one in the car suddenly became silent, and then Jeffreys spoke in a voice audible to the attentive mountaineer.

"Tom Rock, you want ter put a stopper on that mouth of yours. Don't let me hear so much racket!"

Then the black-bearded man at once turned to Griffin as though it was a settled fact that he would be obeyed. He was obeyed. Tom Rock, a burly desperado, submitted to the reproof without a word, and without perceptible vexation. He took it as a matter of course—and so did the other self-styled miners.

More than all the rest, every one heeded Jeffreys's order.

"Thar's a nigger in the wood-pile, sure as I'm alive!" muttered Yank. "That feller ain't got ter be boss o' that crowd at one jump—not much he ain't. I smell a mouse, an' he's an egregious big one."

Awhile longer he watched, and then arose.

"Come, Moses," he said; "we'll go back. I consait Central Pacific Paul an' the rest will be interested, an' it may be thar is lively times ahead. How'd you like ter hev another skirmage, sech as took place when Border Bullet was with us?"

Naturally, Moses made no reply, but Yank seemed just as well satisfied. Entering the car where he had left Ballard, he found him in conversation with Peters, and the story was soon told. It made an impression, for they knew that the mountaineer was not a man to be stirred up by a trifle.

"How do you account for this?" asked the conductor, in a troubled way.

"I'd ruther you'd use your own logic," Yank answered.

"That is easily done, but I want to see how your opinion agrees with mine."

"What is your opinion?"

"It looks very suspicious that this heretofore quiet passenger is now wielding such power over the miners."

"Egregious suspicious."

"Did those miners come here by chance?"

"They come on their legs, I consait, but their legs didn't navigate by chance—sech things ain't a peculiarity o' legs."

"There is something familiar to me about the face of the man with the black beard," declared Peters, "but I can't place him."

"Pity you can't."

"What do you advise, friend Yellowbird?"

"About what?"

"This consolidation of the rough elements."

"I don't see that we kin do anything more than we hev planned ter do—keep a sharp watch all night. The best men o' the lot must keep awake like sentinels on duty, an' a due attention ter the rear car won't be thrown away. Funder than that I don't know, though ef my gran'father was hyar he would tell ye right off. I consait he would enlist all the honest passengers an' drill 'em at onc't, an' the way he'd jam military tick-tacks down their throats would be amazin'. He would form 'em in regiments, brigades an' pontoons, an' keep 'em marchin' all night ter the music o' a drum, a fife an' a fiddle."

"I fancy that the music we need here, if any, is that of revolvers."

"Yet we can't molest them while they are quiet," observed Central Pacific Paul.

"You are right, and we don't want to; we'll keep the peace if they will. Suppose we take another look."

Peters and Ballard went out, but there was no change in the situation. They saw enough to confirm what Yank had said, and no more. When they came back there was another consultation, and arrangements were made for the night. It was agreed that a watch must be kept, and that, divided into two sections, it must include all the men known to be strictly reliable, one-half to watch until two o'clock, and the other half until day dawned again.

The conductor was of the opinion that there

would be no trouble during the first watch, and he asked Paul and Yank to take joint command until the second watch. This he would see to himself, for it was when the honest passengers would naturally be wrapped in sound sleep that the attack would come if it came at all, he thought.

This plan was carried out.

Peters gathered the trainmen and a few others whom he knew to be trustworthy, and the situation was explained to them, as well as the plans for protection. This done, Peters and his assistants of the second watch retired. Their chances of composing themselves to sleep were not of the best.

Ballard and Yank were left in command of six men who were to support them during their term of duty.

The detective had one thing upon his mind which prevented his feeling at ease. When the train was last "made up" two cars had been placed at the rear of all which were to be cut off the morning, after the day on which notice was first drawn to the train in these pages. The hindmost car of all was of the common kind; the next was a sleeping-car.

And in this car was Leonice Ross and her party.

This was the source of Ballard's uneasiness. If there was an attack that car would probably be first assailed, as well as given the brunt of the battle, and Leonice would be in danger. True, two men were on watch there, but what would that avail in an attack where revolvers were drawn and discharged?

Ballard was troubled, and he made frequent trips toward the suspected quarter to observe the rough crowd. These men soon evinced a disposition to go to sleep, and, doubling themselves up, became silent.

The night was very dark, and fog hung about the train and seemed to compress it into fixed space, while water dripped slowly from the cars. A wet, disagreeable, miserable night; a dark, forbidding, ominous night.

What would it bring forth?

Yank Yellowbird was a blessing to Ballard. Nothing seemed to disturb the veteran, and while he showed all the interest and feeling Paul could desire, the Yellowbird humor and quaint conceit flowed with unabated constancy. He told stories about his grandfather and other alleged relatives; he discoursed on "tick-tacks," "newrolgy," "his pedigree," and other favorite subjects; and he was as cheerful as though he expected to retire at once for a night's sound sleep.

Ballard found him an interesting study. Brave, honest, hardy and genial, he seemed to unite nearly all desirable qualities in his character. All that report said of him, Ballard was seeing for himself.

Time passed, and there was no change in the situation. The damp weather kept everybody in the cars as a rule, but Ballard did not trust wholly to the watchmen at the various posts; he made frequent trips toward the rear cars to see that all was well.

Twelve o'clock passed, and the next hour drew near. Eighty minutes more, and all responsibility would be shifted to Luther Peters's shoulders.

Once more Paul went to reconnoiter.

His thoughts strayed for a few moments away from his errand, and then he stopped suddenly, with a confused idea that something was not as it should be—one of those vague impressions which will for a moment assail one when he is abruptly recalled to real life by an unusual circumstance.

Ballard's idea was that he had reached the rear of the train sooner than was to be expected—that the train was remarkably short. He looked into the windows of the car beside him. It was not that which held the miners, yet there was no car connected with it at the rear.

The detective flashed a quick glance to the east. A few yards away the lights of two cars burned with dull steadiness, but between them and the rest of the train was a vacant space.

Ballard quickly arrived at a decision. He mounted to the front platform of the car by which he stood, and, just then, the door opened and one of the watchmen came out hurriedly, looking excited and startled.

"Say, have you seen it?" he demanded.

"Seen what?" Ballard asked.

"They've cut off the two rear cars!"

"Who has done it?"

"The Lord only knows—I don't. It happened not twenty seconds ago. We felt a slight jar, and when we got up to see the cause, the rear cars were gone."

"That's a fact," supplemented the second watchman.

"Could the cars have become uncoupled from this one by natural means?" asked Ballard, quickly.

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"I'll take my oath on it."

"Then the desperadoes have at last got to work, and the battle is about to begin."

Paul's voice showed that he realized the startling peril of the situation, but he was composed and firm.

"Why have they cut off the second car?" asked one of the guards.

"Why, indeed," the detective replied, "unless it is that they want to plunder the passengers at their leisure?"

CHAPTER XVI.

JEFFREYS TAKES CHARGE.

CENTRAL PACIFIC PAUL thought of Leonice as he spoke, and he found the subject extremely painful. He realized how strong was the interest she had aroused within him as he thought of her facing danger from the lawless roughs, and he quickly added:

"Go and call the conductor at once!"

The direction was given to one of the watchmen, and the man hurried away. Paul remained upon the platform, trying to decide what to do. The car at the rear of the larger section of the train was of the ordinary kind, and occupied only by men. It would be easy to back down and connect with the detached cars—if this was allowed. He did not believe that it would be; the uncoupling had not been done in a spirit of idle jest, and he believed that investigation at the rear would show the roughs wide-awake and prepared to resist any attempt to undo their mischief.

Considering how badly the rails were sprung, it was clear that the uncoupled cars had not run backward themselves; they must have been pushed back laboriously.

While he stood thus Paul heard a stealthy movement on one side of the track. He looked down, and then a man appeared. He was bent nearly double and was skulking along like a wolf. As he came into sight he glanced up toward the platform, and he and Ballard looked each other in the face.

The discovery seemed to surprise and startle the prowler; he uttered a faint exclamation, and promptly wheeled and took to flight.

He had not been quick enough to prevent recognition. Ballard remembered the face as that of one of the self-styled miners, and he determined to capture him. The detective leaped to the ground. The prowler was in rapid retreat, but Paul dashed after him with speed which surprised himself. By the time the car was passed they were separated only by a narrow gap, but the fugitive strained every nerve to regain the quarters of his friends.

A revolver sounded at one side and Ballard heard the bullet whistle, but he was not to be frightened off. He made two more long steps and grasped the runaway by the collar.

The man turned with a savage exclamation. His right arm went up, and Paul saw a knife in the brawny hand. Down came the weapon with a fierce sweep, but the detective caught his enemy's wrist, checking the blow, and, with a quick movement, flung him to the ground and fell heavily upon the prostrate form.

Danger menaced the detective, however.

The fellow who had fired the shot had not retreated; on the contrary, he now came rushing toward the other men with murderous intentions. He still held his revolver, but this time he did not intend to throw a bullet away.

He was almost upon Ballard, his revolver already leveled, when another individual appeared. Out of the fog rushed a tall form, and in a moment more the would-be assassin was flung to the ground with a shock which made his joints crack.

"Land o' Goshen!" exclaimed Yank's well-known voice. "You want ter be a slaughterer, do ye, ye condemn'd insex? Want ter chaw somebody up, do ye? By hurley! I consait our crowd has got one member that is some on the chaw, too. Hyar, Moses! keep the critter in subjection!"

Moses promptly planted his fore-feet upon the fallen man's breast, and looked down into his face as though ready to fly at him on the least provocation. The dim light from the car, falling upon the dog's head, revealed a fierceness of aspect which terrified his captive. The latter would as soon have angered a grizzly bear; he lay very quiet.

"Want any help, neighbor?" asked Nevermiss, addressing Ballard.

"Thank you—no!"

Paul glanced toward the detached cars. There was a stir there which showed that others would soon be at the place of encounter.

Ballard unceremoniously jerked his prisoner to his feet.

"March!" he ordered, and setting his face toward the front of the train, he forced him along.

"Let me alone, or it'll be the worse for you!" growled the prisoner.

"I will take the risk."

"Garrett Jeffreys will be after you."

"Who?"

"Garrett Jeffreys, the train-wrecker. He and all his men are over there, and you'll have the whole lot after you if you don't let me go!"

Central Pacific Paul did not reply, but he had gained a flood of light. His captive, in his anxiety to save his own precious neck, had betrayed the secret so well kept by the "gold-diggers."

Garrett Jeffreys, the train-wrecker!

It was a name well known in the West, though few persons could claim ability to recognize the desperado. He had never figured in a court of law; he had never been a prisoner; and his cunning had enabled him to get the reputation of a bold, reckless outlaw without making his face familiar even to officers of law.

He was seldom heard from, and no small crimes were traced to him or his band. When he struck he had invariably, up to the time of our story, secured rich plunder. With this he would retire to some unknown lair and remain quiet for weeks. His field of operation was wide, and he was as liable to strike in Texas as in Dakota, or in California, or in Kansas.

Quiet, secret, cunning, bold and merciless, the man had run a remarkable career as a criminal, and women trembled at the sound of his name. What witches and the giants of old had been to their childhood, Garrett Jeffreys, the train-wrecker, was to their later years.

Neither Ballard nor Peters had ever seen Jeffreys to know him. When they saw his face on the trip with which this story deals, they saw something familiar. This was because they had in the past seen him casually, but not to know who he was.

Jeffreys, not being aware of that, had been very careful not to attract attention to himself.

Both Ballard and Yank found their worst suspicions confirmed by their prisoner's revelation, but the latter did not regain his liberty thereby. He was hurried into the car, with Moses following close to his heels. The dog had deserted the second man in obedience to his master's direction, but his appearance was still aggressive, and he occasionally rolled his eyes upward toward his master, as though asking permission to attack the remaining captive.

By this time Peters had appeared. He carried a revolver, but his manner was cool.

"What's all this?" he asked.

"Perhaps this man can explain," Ballard answered.

"Jeffreys will explain!" retorted the prisoner.

"Was it by his order that the two cars were cut off?"

"Yes."

"What was his object?"

The fellow suddenly changed expression.

"That is for you to find out," he replied.

"Wouldn't you tell?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I've been a fool to tell what I have."

The prisoner told the truth, and now that it had dawned upon him, he stubbornly refused to answer another question. He was thrust into the car for the time being, in charge of a brakeman, and Paul proceeded to tell the conductor all that he knew. Peters caught at a straw.

"The man may have lied," he said.

"About what?"

"Garrett Jeffreys being there."

"Possible, but not probable."

"If Jeffreys and his gang are on the scene, there are warm times ahead."

"I'm afraid so."

"We'll settle it right off."

"In what way?"

"I am going to the other cars. If Jeffreys is there I shall know it, for I shall be met by a challenge."

"Or a bullet," dryly amended Yank.

"I will risk it. We must not leave this matter in doubt for a moment longer than is necessary, for if the occupants of the detached sleeping-car are in the hands of Garrett Jeffreys's gang, I shudder to think of their possible fate."

"I will go with you!" quickly added Ballard.

"Count me in," supplemented Yank. "You furnish the tick-tacks, an' ef it comes ter a squabble, I'll fight like hurley ef the newrolgy don't trouble me."

The mountaineer turned to a brakeman and added, in a confidential manner:

"It's s'prisin', how I do suffer with newrolgy, at times."

Peters descended from the car, Yank and Paul followed, and they advanced toward the detached cars. Each of the trio knew there was danger that they would be met with a shower of bullets, but they went boldly. Their course was directly toward the sleeping-car, and they could see that the rear platform was deserted.

"They may not have gained entrance to the sleeper yet," suggested Peters.

The words had barely passed his lips when the car door opened and a man appeared. That powerful form, with the broad shoulders and black beard, could belong to but one man.

"Jeffreys!" muttered the conductor.

"Halt, there!" loudly ordered the wrecker. "Don't come any nigher, or I shall have ter pop you over."

"Do you know who I am?" demanded the leader.

"Luther Peters, is your name."

"By what authority do you forbid me to approach a car of my own train?"

"The right o' might. These two cars have seceded."

"Did you cut them off?"

"Yes."

"They are to be put back at once, and coupled to the rest of the train."

"Bet yer life they are not!" retorted Jeffreys. "There are two trains here now; you run one an' I run the other; an' ef you molest my half, you'll make an overcoat for a lump of lead."

"Do you defy my authority?"

"Yes, sirree; I do."

"At least, you have no right to the sleeper, and I shall enforce my authority and take it back where it belongs."

Jeffreys laughed hoarsely.

"No, you won't, old man. Why? Because you haven't got men enough ter do it, an' them in the sleeper has cast lots with me."

"How's that?"

"The sleeper folks hev seceded, too. They've decided by vote ter leave you an' foller my lead."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DESERTER.

THE conductor met this assertion with a scornful gesture.

"You grow absurd, now," he replied.

"Do you doubt me?" Jeffreys asked.

"Yes."

"You shall be convinced."

The wrecker opened the door, and Judge Whiting appeared on the platform.

"Friend," continued Jeffreys, "tell these men the truth. They won't b'lieve you are ag'in' them, and with my crowd."

"I can say all in a few words. The occupants of this sleeper have tired of the infamous management of the train, which permits worthy persons to be insulted, bullied and abused by rogues, and by unanimous vote they have decided to separate from those ruled over by one Luther Peters, alleged conductor of the train."

Whiting made this announcement loudly, as though delivering a stump speech, and his tone was venomous. Peters was surprised, but he answered steadily:

"Do you mean that you were a party to the uncoupling of the cars?"

"I was, sir."

"You claim to be a judge. Do you know any law which will uphold you in interfering with a railroad train?"

"I know no law which will compel me to submit to the hobbies of a conductor who will not protect his passengers from ruffians. I appealed to you in vain, and now I am acting for myself."

"In defiance of law."

"Call it what you will."

"I decline to recognize you as spokesman for the occupants of the sleeper. I want to see other men and hear their statements."

"Have your fill!" retorted the wrecker.

He called inside the car and three men came out. Peters recognized them as among his most respectable appearing passengers. He questioned them, and though they were too loyal to their leaders to make any direct charge, the truth soon became apparent. Whiting had made the most of the conductor's refusal to side with him in his altercation with Central Pacific Paul, and had so advanced the idea of injustice on Peters's part that he had converted the misguided gentlemen who now stood beside him and advanced views in keeping with his.

Peters made another argument, but when he saw that it was thrown away, he prepared for a last effort.

"Men, I have heard of those who jumped from the frying-pan into the fire. Are you sure such is not the case with you? Now that you have left me do you know to whose arms you have fled? Do you know the name of the black-bearded man whom you are trusting so implicitly? He is a lawless desperado; he is Garrett Jeffreys, the train-wrecker!"

Silence followed this grave, impressive revelation, but no chance was vouchsafed to see what effect it had upon the hoodwinked passengers.

Jeffreys seemed demoralized for a moment, and then he laughed in an unmusical way.

"Your cause must be despr't when you have ter bolster it up with sech a lie as that!" he noisily cried. "I don't know who Garrett Jeffreys is, but the man who says I am a train-wrecker, lies!"

"Nobody believes it!" declared Whiting.

"You will find it out to your sorrow," Peters insisted.

"We'll take the risk."

"I care nothing for you, sir, but to the other passengers I give due warning. You may be strangers in the West, so I will say that Garrett Jeffreys is a notorious train-wrecker, robber and desperado. Yonder man is he, and the self-styled miners in the rear car are his followers."

"Why, there isn't one of the miners knows him!" declared a deluded passenger. "The miners are with us, feeling that we have been unjustly used, but they insisted that we should elect one of our own number as leader. We chose Mr. Brackley—the man you call Garrett Jeffreys."

"There has been devilish cunning used there!" muttered Paul Ballard.

"Jeffreys got hisself ter the front, someways," added Yank Yellowbird.

"I have just one thing more to say," pursued

Peters. "I am not going to stand here and coax you men to use common sense, but one thing I must insist upon. The ladies in the sleeper must have the privilege of coming to us if they wish."

Jeffreys promptly shouted at the door.

"Any ladies who want ter go with t'other party step right forward!"

There was no perceptible stir.

"I decline to accept such a test!" stoutly declared the conductor. "I am going to see for myself."

He advanced toward the car, and Paul and Yank followed close after. They expected that they would be ordered off, but Jeffreys at once invited them forward. They had no assurance that a trap did not lurk there, but they went on coolly. Room was made for them on the platform.

"The ladies have all retired," said Whiting with a sneering smile, "but they don't seem to be asleep. Ask them what you will."

Peters obeyed. He asked if any one there desired to go to the other cars, and there was a chorus of negatives. He repeated his assertion that they were following the lead of Garrett Jeffreys, but even that did not convince the fair travelers. From behind the curtains came many voices, all declaring that they had heard enough on the subject.

The conductor turned angrily away and marched back toward the main part of the train. With the exception of one sneering remark from Whiting, there were no comments.

Paul Ballard went with extreme reluctance. He remembered his promise to care for Leonice, and he feared for her then. There might be some in the sleeping-car who were not willing occupants, and one might be Leonice.

Leonice! The name was beginning to have a fascination over him, and he thought of her bright young face with an interest which a new acquaintance had never before exercised over him.

Luther Peters sat down viciously in the first car.

"Of all the infernal fools I ever saw, that crowd takes the first prize!" he angrily declared. "The confounded dolts! Say, if there was a clear rail ahead of us, I'd like to get up steam and leave them to make love to Jeffreys. The idea that they should let that low-browed ruffian with the hang-dog face warp their judgment."

"He has not done it all," replied Ballard. "The fine Italian hand of Judge James Whiting is traceable in this affair. Jeffreys could win the low trash, but it is the judge who has deluded the better class."

"I'll make that fellow smart for it."

"We're not out of the woods yet."

"I fancy there is less danger than before."

"How so?"

"Had we not promptly discovered the cutting-off of the two cars, I believe Jeffreys would at once have moved against us, but he knows that he can't take us by surprise now. The only thing we have to fear is a regular battle, and I hardly think he will risk that."

"I am not so sure of it."

"What is your opinion, Yank?"

"My advice," deliberately replied Nevermiss, "is that you wake ev'ry male man in your outfit, an' arm the bull egregious lot. Ef thar ain't reg'lar weepens enough ter go 'round, git irregular ones. Git axes, picks, crowbars, clubs—anything you hev—but git your force ready fur battle, by all means."

"This is the advice of a veteran," added Paul.

"It shall be followed," promptly answered Peters. "No precaution shall be neglected. By Jupiter! I am tempted to charge those fellows."

"Don't do it," advised Yank.

"Perhaps it would be rash."

"Land o' Goshen, yes! Thar is at least twenty-five or thirty on 'em, an' they are armed ekul ter porcupines—at least, the tough ones be. As fur our force, they may be heroes, but they ain't b'en drilled, an' they don't know nothin' about tick-tacks. They'd git licked like the mischief!"

"I doubt if we could get them to charge, anyway," added Ballard.

"You are right, and we won't try it."

The conductor arose and proceeded to carry out his plan. He aroused such men as looked able to do good service, and a force was soon assembled which, as far as personal appearance went, was formidable enough, but the leaders were painfully conscious of one thing lacking.

Revolvers were common, but they had only three rifles. On the other hand all of the train-wreckers who had come with Duke Griffin carried fine rifles. These men, if they saw fit to take position among the neighboring rocks, could do terrible execution in the cars.

Plainly, if the case assumed that condition, the defenders would have to desert the train, charge the sharpshooters and fight it out.

The wreckers still had the advantage, and there was not a sanguine man in Peters's company. The bravest of the lot were cool, but they knew that great danger menaced them.

A man like Garret Jeffreys, who obtained his living by plundering trains, would not let the night pass without an effort of some sort.

There was a slight stir at one end of the car, and a stout fellow advanced toward Peters.

"I want to speak with ye," he announced.

"Go on!" the conductor directed.

"I've got enough o' that crowd," and the speaker stretched one arm out toward the detached cars.

"How so?"

"I've deserted!"

Peters grew interested. He had not suspected that the man was not of his party, and what had seemed a trifling circumstance grew important. The conductor did not betray his surprise, but quietly asked:

"What is your name?"

"Jake Blade."

"Why have you left the other party?"

"I've got enough o' them. Too many bosses sp'ile the whole biz, an' I didn't pay my fare ter start a village with a lord mayor. I'm no doll, but a grizzly b'ar in some ways, I reckon; but I ain't the lad ter buck ag'in' the law. Ef thar is goin' ter be a row thar will be judgment arter it, an' them bolters will get the sack. I've shook 'em, an' hyar I be fur your use ef ye want me."

Mr. Jake Blade spoke with an air which might have impressed some persons as one very frank, bluff and honest, and many of the passengers looked pleased, but Yank and Paul exchanged significant glances. Their opinion of the deserter was not favorable.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JAKE BLADE.

THE deserter composedly bore the glances, curious and suspicious, that were fixed upon him, but Peters hesitated before making a reply. He did not know just what to make of Jake Blade.

"You were one of my passengers," he finally said.

"I was, cap'n."

"Did you know the Duke Griffin gang?"

"No."

"Or Garrett Jeffreys? He calls himself Brackley now, I believe."

"I seen him on the train, but didn't speak ter him," replied Blade, with righteous candor.

"Why did you secede with him?"

"I went with the gang. I'm an artom inclined ter be hot-headed, owin' ter my free-an'-easy life as a cowboy; an' when Whiting said he'd been misused I tossed up my hat an' follered his lead. That's all wal enough in one way, but I have an idy that 'twon't pay ter kick ag'in' the law. I'm rough, but I ain't no tough."

Mr. Blade held his head up proudly and looked as virtuous as though he had just refused a tempting "drink."

"Are there any others in the party who feel like you?"

"Ef so, I didn't hear of it."

"What about those in the sleeper?"

"They're the wu'st o' all. I don't want ter set up ez a critic, but when a high-toned bloke turns kicker he can show more ears than a mule. A rough-an'-ready chap will settle his grudges like a man, with revolver or fists, but let a 'ristocrat feel that he's hurt in his dignity an' he's an ugly reptile. He's too cowardly ter fight, so he swells up like a toad, shows his nasty temper, an' wags his tongue like a lightnin' pendulum. The fav'rite victim o' the high-toned bloke is somebody whose official persition puts him in the 'ristocrat's power—a clerk, railroad man, an' sech. An' ef that chap don't wink jest as big-bug wishes, he wants ter rob him o' his job right away. That's the way with them in the sleeper, an' Whiting has egged them on the best he knowed how."

Blade did not make his statement in scholarly language, and he may have had a selfish object in view, but he had described a state of affairs not new to Peters and his fellow railroad men.

"How about the women?" the conductor asked.

"They go with ther men."

"Willingly?"

"I ain't seen nothin' ter the contrary."

"None of them held prisoner?"

"No."

"What do our seceders intend to do?"

"Whiting laid down the rule that they should simply separate from you, an' run a camp o' their own until help came. Arter that they don't mean ter kick ag'in' ye—at least, so they say."

"Are you sure that they don't intend to attack us?"

Blade's eyes opened wider, and he looked surprised.

"Attack ye?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"Thunder! I ain't heerd nothin' about that."

"Do the passengers know that Brackley is, really, Garrett Jeffreys, the train-wrecker?"

"They know you've said so, but they don't b'lieve it. I was somewhat dubious on that pint, but I took it you knowed what you was talkin' about. Be you sure he is Jeffreys?"

"Yes."

Peters turned abruptly away; he was done questioning Blade, and had no idea of submitting to a catechism in return. He gave orders in a distinct tone that the deserter should be welcomed as a sensible man who had found out

what honor required him to do, and then secretly whispered a few words in Yank Yellowbird's ear:

"I wish you would watch that fellow like a hawk. I doubt his sincerity; he may be a spy sent here to get points. Don't let him get back to the wreckers' quarters."

Then Peters called Ballard, Vaughan and his engineer and held a conversation. All were of one mind. Frank as the deserter had pretended to be, they doubted him. His face was not that of an honest man—on the contrary, he looked like a thorough rascal, and they concurred in the opinion that the man had been sent by Jeffreys as a spy.

Obviously, the wrecker chief had some lawless plan in mind, and Peters had never felt less at ease than he did then. He was sure that the enemy would make some movement before morning, and their terrible rifles would offset any superiority of numbers held by the conductor's party.

The prospect was one of extreme gravity.

When, and how, would Jeffreys make the attack?

In the meanwhile Blade had taken a seat, and it came to pass that Yank promptly sat down beside him. Moses pushed in next to his master's legs and lay there composedly, now and then glancing up at Yank and the deserter.

"I reckon our rain is 'bout over," remarked Blade.

"I shouldn't be a tall surprised," replied Nevermiss.

"I expeck ter see the sun ter-morrer."

"Ain't got no engagement, I s'pose?"

"Skeerely. I remember you on the train."

"Do ye?"

"Yes. Is that a lion or a grizzly b'ar you hev with ye?"

"That's a dog, mister, an' his name is Moses."

"I like dogs, an' always did. Brought up with 'em. My father had up'ards o' fifteen, an' they was my best friends. I slept with 'em, eat with 'em, an' hunted with 'em. I had a dog one't that would take a herd o' wild buffler an' bring 'em ter camp as captyves."

"Jest so; I've see'd that done," mildly replied Yank. "I had a dog once that would take a grizzly bear by the scruff o' his neck an' shake his teeth out—the bear's teeth, not his'n, mind ye."

"Humph!" muttered Blade, looking suspiciously at his tall companion. "My father was a soldier in ther war, an' he tuk three o' his dogs with him. They follered him through over thirty battles, an' when he's in a tight place the dogs would grip the enemy by the throat an' kill 'em. Arter one battle they found forty-one men the dogs had laid out, an' my father was promoted ter be lieutenant."

"My father wa'n't a sojer," calmly answered Yank, "fur he had the newrolgy so egregiously they wouldn't even let him inter the invalid corpse—as they call the horspittle nurses—but my gran'father was a Revolutionary relict who fought like burley, an' he didn't hev no dogs ter help him, neither. He took part in the battle o' Cornwallis, under Washington, an' up'ards o' ninety other pitched fights. He was mortal wal posted in tick-tacks, an' he got promoted fast. He went in as the lowest private in the 'bull brigade, but was soon made captain; then lieutenant; then major; an' when Burgoyne surrendered at Bunker Hill, an' the war eended, my gran'father got a written permission as corporal. That was the highest he could go 'thout takin' Gin'ral Washington's office 'way from him, an' my gran'father said he'd be condemn'd ef he'd do that. He didn't fight none arter that, though his wife used ter provoke him mortally at times."

Blade had no more to say. He gazed sharply at the mountaineer, who made these statements with candor, modest complacency and mild satisfaction, and then subsided.

He realized that his military ancestor stood no chance with the "Revolutionary relict."

Yank stroked his beard and looked at the car-lamp with benign gravity. He had not yet said all that was to be said. He never allowed a man whom he disliked to tell more glowing stories than he, and when it came to a matter of family history, the Yellowbird "pedigree" furnished subject matter to which there was no limit.

Blade changed the subject, but he did not appear wholly at ease. His gaze wandered constantly. He looked at his fellow-passengers; then out of the window; and then at Nevermiss and Moses, as though he wished them a hundred miles away. In point of fact he wished to wander about and note the exact situation among the defenders, and there sat the double guard which hemmed him in.

He finally plucked up courage and observed that he thought he would "stretch his legs a bit," but Yank, never moving an inch, advised him to "set still an' rest," and Blade had an intuition that the best thing he could do was to take that advice.

In the meanwhile Peters and Central Pacific Paul were doing all that they could to insure the safety of the train. Naturally, the mail-car offered the most temptation to the wreckers, and additional precautions had been taken there.

The car had long since been securely closed, with two mail-clerks inside, and since the last alarm a guard had been set on each side.

One of the brakemen, a man named Knight, was something of a frontiersman in the way of trailing, scientific fighting and the like, and he and Ballard made frequent scouting expeditions, all of which failed to discover anything new.

As the minutes wore on Jake Blade's uneasiness increased, and he finally arose abruptly.

"I must hev some fresh air!" he declared. "I never was used ter livin' in a box, an' I can't stan' this."

He resolutely made an effort to press past Yank, and the mountaineer did not object this time.

"I consait I'll get some fresh air, too," the veteran quietly observed.

Blade scowled, but he dared not oppose the idea. He left the car, and Yank went with him. The wrecker spy stopped and looked around. To a practiced eye there were signs of improved weather, but the darkness was of an extreme degree. From each of the cars gleamed dim light, but it did not penetrate far. The cars occupied by the seceders were to all appearances the most quiet of any in the train.

The wrecker looked at them longingly. His mission had proved a failure, and he wished himself out of his present company entirely. He looked at the rocks and wondered how he would succeed in a dash for liberty, but he knew Yank Yellowbird by reputation, and did not dare to try it.

As he looked at the rocks he saw a stir there. Some object, showing darker than the night, flitted across a vacant space. It was gone in a moment, concealed by the rocks, but another, and yet another flitted after it.

Three figures had passed silently and secretly, and Jake Blade believed that he could account for them. He glanced anxiously at Yank. Had he seen them?

The wrecker had no means of knowing; Yank's face had never been calmer or milder than then. He appeared oblivious of all around him, but Blade was uneasy.

Knowing Garrett Jeffreys's plans as he did, he had a theory as to the figures among the rocks. He believed that the peaceful state of affairs would soon be broken; that the wreckers were stealing forward and forming for an attack, and that violence and plunder were not far away.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAIL-CAR.

CENTRAL PACIFIC PAUL moved slowly along beside the train. In front of him was the mail-car, with four trustworthy men guarding it. He saw that they were in a quiet mood, and this seemed a guarantee that all was well there.

Chance led the detective to raise his gaze to the top of the car. He did not expect to see anything unusual there, yet there was something which caught and held his attention—something which projected slightly above the top of the car. What was it? It looked like the end of a loose board, but the idea seemed absurd. Why should a loose board be there?

He addressed one of the guards.

"Where are the mail-clerks?"

"In the car I s'pose, sir," was the reply.

"Have you seen them lately?"

"No."

"Or heard them?"

"No, sir."

Paul glanced up at the projection again. It had not moved; there it was, a mystery and a source of suspicion. In crises, small things count.

The detective advanced to the car door and rapped. There was no response. He repeated the summons with the same result. Three times he knocked, and then his suspicions increased strongly. The mail-clerks knew of the danger—it was very strange that they should sleep so soundly that they could not be awakened.

Ballard had another idea. If he could not enter he could, at least, learn what was the peculiar object on the top of the car. He proceeded to climb up there without delay.

No sooner had he reached the elevation than he plainly saw that the object was a board; but as he walked forward he saw that which surprised him. On the top of the car, held down by the board, was a blanket which was spread out fully.

Ballard knew that something was wrong. The mystery increased, and the situation grew more ominous. He quickly lifted a corner of the blanket, and a strong light flared up in his face.

There was a large opening in the roof, and the interior of the car lay exposed to his gaze.

There had been foul play. He knew that, even though the whole truth was not yet known. There might be desperate men inside who would shoot at sight of him, but he promptly knelt and looked further. In his present position every part of the car was visible. It was well lighted, but no human being could be seen. The car seemed to be deserted; unless the mail-bags, or some other object, concealed the clerks, they were not there.

If they were there, it was not as living men, and there had been foul play of the worst kind.

The detective leaped down into the car. He could see no evidence of disorder in the contents of the place, and he grew more puzzled. A brief search satisfied him that the clerks were not there.

There was but one interpretation to be placed upon this. All that was wrong could not be attributed to the wreckers; they could not have made the hole in the top of the car without being heard by the mail-clerks, nor could the latter have been spirited away by force without alarm. Only one theory remained—there had been treachery from within, and the trusted clerks had robbed the mail and fled.

Ballard looked thoughtfully around. He did not understand the arrangement of the car, but mail was still there in abundance. Some of it must be valuable. The idea flashed upon him that the thieves would return for more, and he formed his plan quickly.

It was not hard to understand how the robbers had got away unseen by the guards outside; once on top of the car they could walk forward on other cars until a safe place of descent was found.

The detective opened the door and, calling a trustworthy man, hurriedly explained the situation and made known his plan. Going to the roof again, he arranged the blanket and the board just as he had found them. By that time one of his aids had reappeared with Moses in charge. A few more directions were given to the men, and then Ballard closed the door with only himself and the dog inside.

Moses was curious, for this was a new kind of trail, but he did not lower his dignity to exhibit curiosity as other dogs would have done. Standing perfectly still, he looked around the car with a grave, wise and critical air which was peculiar.

Ballard knew that he could depend upon the intelligent animal as well as on a man, and his preparations were hurriedly completed.

Rearranging the mail-bags he formed a hiding-place for himself and the dog, and then laid a breastwork of bags before them which completed the concealment.

Moses submitted to everything obediently, yet with an air of grave concern. He had been instructed in the art of trailing Indians and wild game until he was perfect, but this was his first experience in trailing mail-robbers. He was willing to learn, but, no doubt, he regarded the trail as a very queer one.

Feeling that he was needed outside Ballard devoutly hoped that he would not be kept waiting a great while, and in this respect he was happily accommodated.

Suddenly there was a slight sound on the top of the car, and he peered out between two mail-bags and watched the opening above.

The blanket was drawn aside.

"A rough, heavily-bearded face appeared at the opening."

It was not one of the clerks, and Paul believed that he recognized one of the train-wreckers.

The man was in no hurry to descend. Instead, he looked all around with an appearance of curiosity and doubt. There was a brief delay, and then he moved again and dropped to the floor. A second man appeared, swung himself partly down, rearranged the blanket, and then dropped beside his friend.

"It's a squar' deal," said the latter.

"Looks like it."

"I reckon we are in fur a haul," and the speaker looked around with an air of satisfaction.

"Ef they don't drop on us."

"Not much danger o' that. They won't think o' us digging in from the top, while as fur the mail-clerks, they must 'a' been fully trusted."

"Lucky we've gobbled them."

"For us, yes; but they've played Judas in vain. Wal, sech things will happen. How shall we begin?"

"We can't carry off much."

"No."

"We can't stop ter open letters an' look over what is in 'em. I say, let's each take two bags an' skip. It'll all be luck, anyway, whether we get a rich or poor haul."

"Right you are. Wal, hyar's bag first."

The man flung one of the sacks down on the floor.

"Wait," said his companion. "We want ter make sure thar are letters inside. We might get sold on newspapers."

They made an examination which was satisfactory, and the sack was accepted as one of the required four. They turned to renew the work, but the sound of voices outside drew them to the door. It seemed to be fast; the voices ceased; they turned around in a relieved way.

Never had they had a greater surprise, for in the space they had left occupied only by the mail-sack were two living creatures, and a startling spectacle was presented to their gaze.

The robbers recoiled in dismay. In the middle of the car stood Central Pacific Paul, and the dog.

The movements outside had so diverted the interlopers' attention that they had heard nothing

inside, and the detective and his dumb friend had made their change of position successfully. They were now the prominent figures of the group. Paul held a revolver ready for use, while Moses only awaited the word of command to fly at the robbers like a hungry tiger.

"Stand where you are!" commanded the detective, sharply. "You are my prisoners, and your safety depends upon obedience. Don't dare to draw a weapon!"

"What's all the row about?" muttered one of the robbers.

"It is about you, and will be with you if you try to resist. If you are wise men you will bear this in mind."

"We ain't done no harm."

"You will not do any."

Paul spoke with calm confidence, and he followed up the order with a distinct whistle. It was a signal, and the door which the intruders had thought fastened, was promptly opened and the trainmen appeared.

"Secure the prisoners!" the detective added.

It was a bitter downfall, but there was no help for it. The odds were against the robbers, and an attempt to resist or run away would be equally useless. Actuated by a common impulse, they submitted without any disturbance.

The easy victory pleased Ballard, but Moses looked as though he would much rather have grappled with the enemy. He did not leave the mail-sack until properly directed by Paul, but his great eyes followed every movement of the prisoners threateningly.

"So far all is well," observed the detective.

"I recognize you two men as members of Garrett Jeffreys's party. Now give me an explanation."

"We ain't got none," asserted one of the wreckers, in a surly voice.

"Speak fur yerself," his companion quickly exclaimed. "I ain't goin' ter hurt my chances by bein' obstinit."

"You're a sensible man," answered Ballard. "Speak out."

"Your counter-jumpers in hyar went wrong. They wa'n't so durned honest as they might be, an' when the train pulled up they thought they seen their chance. They took it—an' all the valuables they could conveniently carry. They made a hole through the roof an' got out; then they went forrard over the cars ter the front end an' skipped out. Luck was ag'in 'em, though, an' they run straight inter our gang. We got them an' their plunder, an' when we had squeezed the story out o' them, we thirsted fur more plunder. You see how we've got it!"

The speaker looked very much disgusted.

"And Jeffreys has the stolen letters yet, has he?" asked Paul.

"He ain't likely ter give 'em up."

"He is likely to do so!" retorted the detective.

"How so?"

"If I conclude to tell you I'll notify you before I begin."

Ballard turned abruptly to one of the brakemen.

"Packard, will you take good care of these prisoners?"

"Yes, sir," was the prompt reply.

"Do so."

So saying Ballard walked quickly away with Moses following at his heels. He met the conductor walking by the side of the train.

"Peters, there is work for us to do!" he exclaimed.

"What work?"

"We must attack the wreckers!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE ASSAULT.

THE conductor gazed at Ballard in amazement.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I say that we must attack the wreckers," Paul replied.

"The dickens we must!"

"Yes; the time of inaction is past."

"What has broken loose?"

"We have gobbled our men in the mail-car, and developments have followed."

The detective then revealed the treachery of the mail-clerks.

"This," he added, "decides our future course. For the sake of peace and the safety of our passengers we have allowed Jeffreys's men to do as they pleased, but we can delay no longer. The United States Mail has been robbed and our duty is plain. I shall endeavor to regain it if I have to go alone."

"Bless you! you won't have to go alone!" exclaimed Peters. "Such an idea is absurd. I, too, have a duty to perform, and when I back out for a dozen odd train-wreckers, don't tell anybody my name is Lute Peters. What's your plan?"

"I have not formed it yet. I want you and Yank Yellowbird in the council. There isn't a man in the West I would trust more to form a good scheme than Yank. He isn't a detective or a railroad man, but long experience with Indians and lawless white men has sharpened his wits."

"Right you are; have him by all means. I'll send a man to relieve him of his watch over the

self-styled deserter, and then we'll see what the tall scout can suggest."

Yank was duly summoned, but he had no elaborate plan to advance.

"This is a case whar tick-tacks ain't worth a pinch o' poor snuff," he observed. "We might try ter separate the enemy by some strategem, an' it might work; an' then, ag'in, it might not. I consait Garrett Jeffreys ain't a fool, of all accounts are kerreck, an' he's liable ter see right through the scheme an' be put on his guard."

"What do you advise?"

"A bold forrud movement. I've heerd my gran'father say that was the way John Paul Jones captured Bunker Hill. He jest moved right up sudden, an' Wellin'ton, the British gin'ral, was took by surprise an' by his coat-collar. The chances are that Jeffreys don't expect an attack, an' ef we make a dash we'll cause him a heap o' tribulation an' distress."

This was not the advice Peters and Ballard had expected, but, after a brief consultation, it was agreed that it was better so. Peters began to be ashamed of having allowed the wreckers to rule a part of his train so long, and he was eager for the affray. He had good aids in Ballard, Yank, Vaughan and the trainmen, and he grew confident.

After all, perhaps a sudden dash would prevent the shedding of much blood.

The party was formed as quickly, but secretly, as possible, and marshaled in the rear car. Then the word was given and they filed out at the forward end. Forming in two parties they awaited the command from Peters.

It was given, and they dashed forward at full speed, yet without a word to betray their movements.

The distance was but short, and was soon passed. The detached "sleeper" they ignored. Running past it they sprung at the rear car, Paul and Yank leading one line, and Peters and Hubert Vaughan the other.

At first sight the platform of the wreckers' car seemed defenseless and lodgment sure, but they were speedily shown that Jeffreys had not been reckless of danger. As the assailants leaped up the steps, a foe appeared from an unexpected quarter. If the platform of the ordinary car had been untenanted, it was not so with the sleeper. There lurked the foe, and just when the assailants were the most hopeful the storm came.

There was a rush, and the wreckers were upon them.

The blow of a revolver knocked Peters completely off the platform, and only a timely parry on Yank's part saved Paul from a glittering knife. The fight was begun in full earnest, and out of the rear car came the main body of the wreckers.

It was a fierce struggle, in which the attacking party strove to maintain place on the platform, and the defenders tried to drive them off. Ballard knew that it was a desperate hope. Fighting thus, the wreckers had a decided advantage, and had it not been for the fact that the bulk of the assailants had orders to force an entrance where they could—at the other doors and at the windows—he would not have expected to win.

He knew, however, that his men were busy.

Mingled with the other sounds of strife was the rattling of glass, which showed that the windows were suffering.

Somewhat to the detective's surprise, not a shot had been fired, and as the wreckers possessed all the advantages in that respect, he hoped no one would set the example.

Side by side with Paul fought Yank Yellowbird, and he was the most noticeable figure in the scene. Much as the tall mountaineer loved peace, battle possessed a fascination for him when he was once engaged, and he was as enthusiastic as a schoolboy.

"Come on, ye atrocious insex!" he shouted. "Wade in an' do yer p'izonest; you'll find us ter home. Hullo! do you want a shy at me, mister? All right—wade in. I'm a martyr ter malignant an' voylent newrolgy, but the Yellowbirds kin shake off a'flictions wonderful when put to it. My cousin, the poetry writer, writ a legacy on the subjick which I'd recite ef I had time. Hullo! did I hurt ye? Wal, mebbe I did hit an artom hard!"

Yank was cheerful, and his strong arms did wonders; but it was an undeniable fact that their chances were not of the best. Not a foot could they gain, and only desperate efforts enabled them to hold place on the platform.

Only a few could get at the wreckers at once, and these few got many a blow and wound.

Suddenly Ballard saw Garrett Jeffreys's fierce eyes glaring upon him.

"I'm after ye, younker!" cried the burly wrecker. "I know ye now, Central Pacific Paul, an' I'll do ye up so quick ye won't know who else the lightnin' struck!"

He was pressing forward to carry out his threat when he felt a sudden, sharp pain in the lower part of his leg. Hardy man that he was he yelled outright. He tried to leap back, but some power held him fast. He looked down in terror—he could not understand this novel attack—and saw the gleaming eyes of Yank Yellowbird's dog. Scant room was there on the platform for Moses—that was all that had saved the wrecker's throat—but the dog had pushed through somehow, as Jeffreys saw to his sorrow, and sharp teeth were tearing at the outlaw's leg.

"Malediction!" Jeffreys yelled, "is this the devil himself?"

It was not—it was Moses, and Moses held fast.

Jeffreys reached for his revolver, but at that moment one of his men, reeling back from a heavy blow received at Paul's hands, fell against his chief, knocking him back, and, much to Jeffreys's relief, the dog's hold was broken.

Ballard's hopes wavered. The advantage of position possessed by the wreckers offset the superiority of numbers held by the assailants, and it was a patent fact that the latter were not fighting with their first zeal. They had made no headway, and with the exception of Ballard, Yank, Vaughan and the trainmen, they were found lacking at the crisis. The brave leaders found their support grow weaker, and as they became the objects of almost undivided attack, they were forced from the platforms.

Their lukewarm supporters only waited to see this—they turned and beat a disorderly retreat.

The battle was lost, and Paul, Yank and Peters had no choice but to follow their panic-stricken party.

Perhaps bold action on the part of the wreckers would have given them the victory then; but they were not in condition to follow. Victory was theirs, but it had been dearly purchased. Half of Jeffreys's own party were incapacitated from further action, and the doughty chief had a wound in his leg which acted more on his mind than on his flesh and muscles. Wounds from knife and bullet he had plegmatically borne in the past, but the fear of hydrophobia now weakened his courage.

Ordering Duke Griffin to put things to rights, the captain bobbled into the "sleeper" and called upon Dan Hopper, who was something of a surgeon, to give prompt attention to the wounded leg.

The sleeping-car was a scene of confusion. Every one of the passengers was up; all were excited; and the majority were pale-faced. They had begun to realize that their childish course in seceding had brought serious consequences.

In the rear car there was not an unbroken window, but the sleeper had been spared; it was in no way injured.

The passengers wanted to question Jeffreys, but all his own thoughts were centered on what Moses had done, and he drove away the would-be inquirers with fierce looks and violent words. Hopper performed his work well. The wound was deep and painful, for Moses had a tenacious grip, but it was not dangerous—unless Jeffreys's pet fear of hydrophobia was realized.

Hopper proved a good doctor, for he mixed his attention to the wound with cheerful assurances which relieved his chief's mind, and by the time the work was done Jeffreys's fears had in a measure abated. His resentment against the assailants, however, was at white heat.

He soon found an object upon which to vent it. As he walked into the passage he was met by Griffin.

"Anything more, captain?" the lieutenant asked.

"Is all quiet?"

"Yes."

"Let it stay so. Whar are those demons who attacked us?"

"In their cars. I don't think we need fear another attack."

"Prepare fur it, anyhow."

"I have. By the way, we have two prisoners."

"Ha! not Central Pacific Paul? But of course not; that would be too good luck."

"We haven't him, but one of his friends was left senseless and has just come to. I refer to Hubert Vaughan."

Judge Whiting suddenly stepped forward.

"I beg that you hold fast to that man!" he hurriedly said. "He is a ruffian; a dangerous man. Don't let him escape!"

"I join in that request," added Arlington, eagerly.

"Don't you think I need any coaxin', fur I don't," replied the wrecker. "I know Mr. Vaughan, myself, an' I'm glad we hev got him. Trot him in, Duke, an' we'll find some way to make him squirm. By Judas! I'd like to hang him up in true executioner style, an' I ain't sure but I will. We have a rope, an' he has a neck. No more is needed!"

The ruffian laughed hoarsely at what he believed a good specimen of wit, but Leonice Ross, glancing at Madam Pulaski, saw her grow very pale. Margaret's lips parted as though she would speak, but, instead, she gazed mutely at Jeffreys, her face expressive of terror and dismay.

Hubert Vaughan was conducted into the car.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WRECKER'S ROPE.

VAUGHAN walked boldly, but Jeffreys saw something upon which to comment.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "the fellow is so terrified that he is pale as a school-gal!"

"You speak falsely!" retorted Vaughan, "I received a blow which left me senseless, and I have but just recovered. I may be pale, but it will take more than a barbarous ruffian like you to frighten me."

"Carry a civil tongue, young feller, or I will find a way to curb it."

"While I have the power of speech I shall say what I please," the prisoner calmly answered.

"Your talkin' is about over, my young rooster."

"Don't be too sure."

"Do you doubt it?"

"I expect to live to see Jeffreys, the train-wrecker, in the hands of the hangman."

The burly chief laughed loudly.

"Was anything ever more timely?" he cried.

"I have jest given orders ter have a rope brought for your use, an' I reckon I know whom Jack Ketch will get first. Jack Ketch, youngster, is an old-time name fur Judge Lynch!"

One of the more respectable passengers stepped forward.

"I hope, sir, there will be no violence," he said, uneasily. "We have been with you, but we can countenance no lawlessness."

"I don't care a red what you 'countenance,' or don't like. I am runnin' this show."

"In the style common to Garrett Jeffreys, robber, train-wrecker and murderer," added Vaughan, boldly.

"Thar's no two ways about it, we must hand you over ter Jack Ketch!" growled the wrecker. "You carry too free a tongue by fur."

"He is a dangerous man," agreed Whiting.

"We're not safe while he lives," added Arlington.

"For shame!" cried Leonice, stepping quickly forward. "You two men call yourselves gentlemen, and now you advocate murder. You show your true colors, at last!"

"Girl, your place is with the women!" sternly answered Whiting.

"And yours is with the company to which you appear to have gravitated naturally—Garrett Jeffreys's gang!"

Her spirited retort was an accurate shot, and Whiting clinched his hands in anger.

"Be silent!" he exclaimed.

"And let the murder-party have all the argument to themselves? No! I will speak; I will be heard; and I call upon every honest man here to aid me."

Very beautiful she looked as she stood there with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, and she was not without converts. One of the passengers spoke promptly:

"The young lady is right, though I cannot believe that any one here thinks seriously of such an atrocity as has been named."

"Ef you think it's a joke you'll find out mighty quick!" declared Jeffreys. "I am boss hyar, an' I tell you we are goin' to make an example. We couldn't use our rifles on them dudes, but a rope makes no noise. That infernal dog has nearly chawed my leg off, an' I am goin' to have revenge. He's the man I'll take it on!"

The wrecker leveled one arm at Vaughan.

"You coward!" ejaculated Leonice, "would you deal thus with a prisoner?"

"That's just what I would do, an' will."

"Miss Ross, stand back where you belong!" ordered Whiting, sternly.

"Not until I have your promise to protect the prisoner."

"Madam Pulaski," cried the judge, "come forward and take charge of this willful girl!"

Margaret started as from a painful dream. She and Hubert Vaughan had been equally silent, but he, disdaining to plead for his life, had been gazing fixedly at her. Blind, indeed, would he have been had he failed to see that she was deeply agitated. She was pale to a startling degree—her face looked like carved marble, so pale and rigid did it appear—and the expression of horror had not faded away.

Vaughan thought of her more than than of of his own peril; he was trying to understand her emotion. He thought with some bitterness that if it was Duke Griffin who was menaced with death there would be good reason for her despairing look, but how could it be accounted for under present circumstances?

She started, but did not obey Whiting's voice.

"Do you hear?" he added.

Duke Griffin moved toward her.

"Come!" he said; and laid his hand upon her arm.

Madam Pulaski flung it off as though it had been a serpent.

"Stand back!" she huskily exclaimed.

"Madam," ordered Whiting, his eyes flaming, "must I again remind you that you are in charge of Leonice, or of the obedience I exact of you? Obey me, or I may tell more than you wish known!"

The hidden menace was successful. Again Margaret started, and though her face bore an expression of misery which an enemy would have pitied had he been less than a villain, she went to Leonice's side.

"Come, dear," she said, brokenly; "come away and let the men settle it."

"And leave those wretches to do their work? I will not!"

Leonice's voice rung out with glorious defiance. There was nothing course or rude in her manner—all was womanly; but she faced them all with heroism which a man might have envied. It had an unfortunate result.

"The darling!" cried Garrett Jeffreys; "she is as pooty as a rose, I swear! I like her style, but we can't let her rule hyar. Put all the women out o' the way, Duke, an' we will settle with our prisoner in a twinklin'."

He caught the rope which one of his followers had brought, and then, seeing that a noose had been formed in one end, gave it a fling so skillful that the noose fell over Vaughan's head and dropped to his shoulders.

"Now, up with him!" the wrecker added.

There was a woman's shrill cry, and Margaret Pulaski sprung forward and cast off the rope. She stood by Vaughan, panting as though from violent exertion.

"You shall not touch him!" she cried.

"Ha! do you interfere too?" demanded Jeffreys.

"I do, and you shall not touch him while I live!"

"What is he ter you?"

"He is a human being, whether you are or not."

"I have an idea in my mind," harshly interrupted Griffin. "I have thought there was something familiar about this man's face, and I begin to see where the likeness points. Margaret, your lover is in sore trouble, I must say!"

He smiled mockingly, but Jeffreys muttered a furious exclamation.

"We have had enough of this," he declared. "We are not hyar ter be ruled by women, an' we won't be. Duke Griffin, no more nonsense. Take the woman away!"

The lieutenant advanced.

"No, no!" Margaret cried; "you shall not touch him!"

"Say no more," Vaughan directed, in a gentler voice. "Do not plead to these wretches for me."

Griffin's hand was almost at Margaret's arm, but she suddenly drew a revolver and presented it to his breast.

"Touch me at your peril!" she said, in a thrilling voice.

He recoiled, and for a moment Madam Pulaski and her revolver held the crowd helpless and spellbound.

"Great Scott!" growled Jeffreys, breaking the silence, "what next? The women rule, sure. Take that revolver away, somebody!"

"I will shoot the first man who attempts it!" asserted Margaret, with the calmness of despair.

Leonice managed to free herself from the grasp of one of the wreckers, and she hurried forward to Margaret's side.

"Is there no man here who is brave enough to aid us?" the girl cried. "Is honor and courage dead within all of you? Are you so destitute of manhood as to stand and see two weak women do the work which should be yours?"

The appeal was not made in vain; a passenger stepped forward and spoke firmly. All had been in great fear of the train-wreckers, but the limit of their weakness had been reached. A man had been found to head the opposition, and he made himself heard.

"I am with the ladies," he said. "This affair has gone far enough, and the idea of a tragedy here is shocking. Who is with me?"

Every passenger except Whiting and Arlington stepped to the side of the speaker.

"We demand good usage for the prisoner," a second man firmly declared.

There was a lull during which everybody looked at Garrett Jeffreys. Nearly every one held him in awe, knowing his reputation, and they waited breathlessly to see what he would do. He seemed undecided, himself, for several seconds, but finally thrust his revolver back into his belt.

"Have yer own way," he responded. "It ain't worth while to have a row over a small matter, an' we will let it slide. Boys, put away the rope, but don't unbind or lose him. He's too valuable."

"I've got some papers I took from his pocket," observed Dan Hopper.

"I'll look 'em over; they may be o' interest."

The captain took the papers and went to the further end of the car, while Hopper escorted Vaughan to a seat. Madam Pulaski sat down pale and trembling, and Leonice took place beside her.

"You are not well," said the girl, solicitously. "No; my remark is absurd. This scene has been too painful for you."

"It has been painful," Margaret confessed, speaking in a faint voice.

"Dear Madam, I care more than ever for you now that you have so nobly taken my part."

Margaret pressed the girl's hand but did not answer. How little did Leonice surmise the true state of affairs! She had not heard the interview by the cliff, and could not know what Madam and Vaughan had once been to each

other. Leonice glanced quickly toward Whiting and Arlington.

"Continue my friend and you shall not regret it," she continued, lowering her voice. "I have lost all confidence in Whiting and Arlington, and I want one friend. Don't you desert me, Madam!"

The words gave Margaret another pang. She was the confederate of the men in deceiving Leonice, and she dared not rebel against them.

At that moment one of the wreckers hastily entered the car. Jeffreys was reading the letters taken from Vaughan, but he put them away quickly as his man whispered a few words in his ear. Both then left the car with the same haste shown by the subordinate when he entered.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NOTICE ON THE DOOR.

CENTRAL PACIFIC PAUL stood near the engine in a mood far from agreeable. The failure of the attack not only irritated but troubled him, for he remembered Leonice and her peril. It was bad enough to be beaten in battle, but he did not disguise from himself the fact that his thoughts dwelt more upon the girl and her situation than their failure.

Since the retreat the men had been trying to get themselves into condition again. There were ugly wounds to dress, but, strangely enough, no one appeared to be fatally injured. It was the wonder of the hour that the wreckers had not used their rifles and revolvers. The assailants would certainly have done so had it not been for beginning a mode of warfare in which the enemy, owing to their rifles, would have had all the advantage.

But why had the wreckers refrained?

Nobody could account for this fact.

Ballard looked carefully around, and two things became apparent. The storm was over, and day was near at hand.

He looked at the river in front of the engine. That, too, was decreasing in volume, and he began to hope that they could cross before the next noon. He glanced across the stream. His manner had been gravely curious, but he suddenly started and looked more sharply.

An unusual object had met his gaze.

He shaded his eyes with his hand and looked again. If his eyes did not deceive him he saw a light glimmering in the darkness.

Here was something of importance. Not one of his party had crossed the stream, and he felt sure that the same statement would apply to the wreckers, yet there was the light on the further side. There was no longer any room to doubt. The light was moving, and it seemed to approach.

Was help at hand, at last?

He waited anxiously. Pursuing a zigzag course the light came on, and all doubt soon vanished. A man who carried a lantern was advancing toward the stream. He came nearer; he reached the water. Ballard determined to call.

"Who is there?" he shouted.

"Hullo!" was the prompt reply. "Is somebody there?"

"I am here. Who are you?"

"Sent to help the train out, and I reckon I have found it."

"The train is here."

"Wrecked?"

"No. Stopped by the flood. What party have you?"

"A hundred men to lay the track again."

"Thank Heaven!" muttered the detective; "we shall soon be all right."

Peters came hurrying up.

"What the dickens are you yelling about, and what is that light?" he asked.

"Help at last. Wait until I question him further. What are the chances of getting us out of here?" he added, raising his voice.

"We'll have it done by to-morrow. The water is going down already. Can I cross?"

"If so, you can do better than any of us. Still, the water is going down, as you say, and it may be possible. I wish you could get over at once and bring all your men. There is trouble here."

"What is wrong?"

"Garrett Jeffreys's train-wreckers are here, and we think they may attack us at any time."

"Great Scott! We'll get over, somehow."

The light moved up the stream.

"I am more than half of the opinion that a crossing can be made above," continued Ballard, addressing Peters. "The water has decreased rapidly, as is natural, and there are places among the rocks where it must be decidedly shallow."

"Suppose we get a lantern and go up this bank to aid our ally?"

"A good idea. We will do it."

They retraced their steps, but had gone only a few rods when they encountered a brakeman.

"Say," exclaimed that person, "the wreckers have skipped out!"

"What's that?" Peters demanded.

"Jeffreys and his men have gone."

"How do you know?"

"One of the Judas passengers have just come with the report."

"It may be a trap for us."

"Possibly, but he says Jeffreys and his gang, with the other toughs, have disappeared and left their passenger allies to shift for themselves."

"Were any prisoners taken?" asked Paul, quickly.

"I didn't hear of any."

"We must attend to this."

The detective hastened back, followed by Peters and the brakeman. The rear cars had not been reached when they met the passengers in a body. It was a downcast, anxious crowd. The attempt upon Hubert Vaughan's life had shown them with what sort of men they had associated, and the black-bearded leader stood stripped of his thin disguise as "Brackley" and was revealed as Garrett Jeffreys; and when they learned that the wreckers were really gone they found themselves in the pitiable plight of men who had followed a "false god" and been deserted by him in the crisis.

Very humble and frightened were they, and though not one of them had taken part in the recent fight, they had a foreboding that the law would take them to task for having associated for a time with the wreckers.

Central Pacific Paul saw that Leonice was safe, and then he became the cool-headed officer at once.

Accompanied by Peters, Yank and several others he went to the detached cars. No one remained to greet their sight. The rear car was a wreck, as far as glass went, and seemed to have passed through a veritable battle.

Entering, they were going through the car on a mechanical tour of investigation when a white paper was seen showing in relief against a door. Ballard advanced and found it covered with writing in a bold, plain hand. The wrecker's name was signed at the bottom, but the spelling and form of expression were better than the chief's conversation. It was as follows:

"NOTICE!"

"The soft-heads in the other part of the train are notified that when they see this they will not see the writer. I am of the opinion that it is time to evacuate this camp. Help for the stalled train is not far away—there are men on the other side of the torrent—and we will bid you farewell. If we had not known of their presence when you made your attack, it would have been a deadly fight for you. Being aware that the relief party was at hand, we dared not use our firearms."

"Although we suffer a partial defeat, we have not done so very badly. Thanks to the treacherous mail-clerks, whom we met and captured as they were making off with their plunder, we have letters, and so forth, which will yield a good harvest. Also, we take one prisoner—Hubert Vaughan. His papers, found in his pocket, proved that he is a man of means. We shall hold him for a ransom; though with that, he and his personal friends only, have to deal."

"And now, dear comrades in a jolly Overland journey, let me bid you farewell in the immortal language of old Rip Van Winkle, as near as I can remember it: 'Here's to you and your folks—may you live long and prosper.'"

"GARRETT JEFFREYS."

The letter explained a good deal that was of importance, but Paul's first thoughts were of Vaughan. He had found that gentleman an intelligent, pleasant companion, as well as a brave man, and was deeply concerned to know of his captivity. In the presence of so much to think about, he had not been missed after the return from the fruitless attack, but there was no doubting the "notice."

Peters went to the passengers at once to inquire what they knew about the matter, and returned with an account of the scene in the sleeping-car when Jeffreys's rope had played its part. Vaughan had been taken from the car quietly, and, soon after, it was known that the wreckers had disappeared.

This explanation was barely finished when Madam Pulaski appeared at Ballard's side. Her face was pale, and there was that in her expression which startled Paul.

"I want to speak with you," she said in a trembling voice.

"I am at your service, Madam Pulaski."

"Has Hubert Vaughan been taken away by the wreckers?"

"So it seems."

"Why?"

"A ransom is to be demanded for him—at least, so the letter says."

"Let me see it, please."

Ballard obeyed. Margaret read rapidly, while he watched her curiously. He had discovered that there was something between her and Vaughan—a drama of the past or present—but as he noticed her agitation and her trembling hands, he was somewhat surprised.

She finished and then raised her head suddenly.

"Held for ransom!" she repeated. "That excuse is very transparent."

"Do you doubt it?"

"I certainly do. True, it may be that they will exact money for Mr. Vaughan—very likely they will—but his captivity was never suggested by thoughts of mere ransom. Do you suppose that Jeffreys wrote that letter? Do you suppose a man as uneducated and rough as Jeffreys is could have written it? No! I see in it the hand

and head of another person, and it was he, I am positive, who suggested the abduction."

"Who is that man?"

"Duke Griffin!"

"Indeed!"

"I wish I knew that Mr. Vaughan is held for ransom only—that is, that no harm will be done him—but I know that Griffin was actuated by personal motives. To what extent he will carry his hatred I do not know, but *I shall hear from him again!*"

The last words were spoken in a whisper, and her eyes grew large and startled.

"It seems that you knew Griffin in the past," gently answered the detective.

"Yes."

"Has he abducted Vaughan to be revenged upon you?"

It was a direct question and Paul hardly expected an answer, but it was freely given.

"To be revenged upon me and upon Vaughan—though the latter is wholly innocent. It is the venom of Griffin's evil nature. And now, I have come to you with a distinct purpose, Mr. Ballard, knowing you to be a detective. Hubert Vaughan is in peril, and he was captured in your service. You are a brave man, with other men at your command. Will you rescue Vaughan from the wreckers?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FAIR REBEL.

MADAM PULASKI'S voice grew strong and earnest, but her face bore a look of pleading as humble as a child's. In her emotion she laid one hand on the detective's arm, and her great eyes looked imploringly into his. Vaughan's peril had moved her so deeply that her habitual mask was at last thrown off, and Ballard would have been blind not to read her and her emotion.

"She loves Vaughan!" he thought.

His reply was made without hesitation.

"In one word, Madam Pulaski—yes! I should be unworthy the name of detective and man if I let this matter pass. Jeffreys's band has robbed the mail and abducted one of my most trustworthy aids. The first fact, alone, would compel me to follow it up, and to this is added Vaughan's unfortunate plight. I shall take a few good men and pursue Jeffreys as soon as we reach the next town. More than that, I will beat him if it takes three months!"

The detective's eyes glittered ominously. He was deeply chagrined over the failure of the attempt to defend the train, and was resolved to punish the wreckers.

Madam Pulaski gave him her hand.

"Thank you," she said, tremulously; "thank you a thousand times. And now may I suggest one man for your rescue-party?"

"Certainly. Who is he?"

"Yank Yellowbird!"

"A better man could not be found. He is brave, shrewd and experienced; has moved and lived in the mountains of almost every Western State and Territory until his sagacity is a proverb; and he unites all the qualities necessary for the work. I will ask him."

"Send for him now, please."

It was done, and Nevermiss came with his long rifle in his hands and Moses at his heels. Ballard briefly explained.

"Go with ye!" exclaimed Yank; "why, sartain I will. I was makin' a pleasure trip with Moses, but we'll be glad ter lay over an' help do up them atrocious insex. I'm sorry Vaughan is in tribulation an' distress, fur he struck me as bein' a right good chap. Reminded me o' my gran'father, only their dispersions was diff'rent, an' they didn't look a tall alike."

"I rely upon you to do the trailing," pursued Paul.

"I consait Moses an' I kin do it between us, fur that is our best holt. I never was much on the fight, fur my left foot is a mortal big coward,—a reg'lar weak sister."

"Your reputation is well known to me, mountaineer."

"Hope nothin' is said about me that is d'og-ratory ter the Yellowbird pedigree?"

"Most certainly not."

"Every one knows you to be a hero," added Margaret, "and, Mr. Yellowbird, I feel sure you will do your best."

"To be sure. I'll work ag'in' 'em like the mischief."

He nodded violently, and then leveled his index finger at Margaret and added:

"We'll make an egregious diffikilty among 'em, an' show 'em we're the wu'st kind o' actyve animosity; that's what we'll do. I once had a cousin who writ poetry, an' she composed an epeack poem, as she called it—"

"Epic, I think you mean," suggested Paul.

"Much obleeged. I ain't so used ter poetry names as I be ter rifle an' trap. She teachd me the names o' the various verses—my cousin did—but besides epicure I only remember thar was idols, pasture poems, hay-racks, linnets an' roundabouts. Mebbe I ain't got *them* right, though?"

"We understand you."

"All right; but ef you understand the diff'rent kinds o' poems you beat me. I don't now, an' I didn't then, an' I tol' my cousin so."

"You must grapple with 'em," sez she.

"I shall git throwed," sez I.

"Nonsense," sez she.

"Tain't nonsense when you wrestle with sech p'izen names as them," sez I.

"Remember you're a Yellowbird," sez she.

"That's jest what worries me," sez I; "I'll git throwed, an' then thar'll be a blot on the pedigree," sez I.

"Tell ye what," sez she, "I'll make you the subjick o' a roundabout I'm goin ter write."

"Will it be painful ter me?" sez I.

"I'll canonize ye," sez she.

"I object," sez I; "I want a fair fight, an' no cannons ain't allowed."

"Canonize means ter declar' a chap ter be a saint," sez she, laughin' like the mischief.

"That settles it," sez I, "I won't low you ter wander from the path o' voracity, nohow. I ain't no saint," sez I, "an' don't ye compose no idols nor linnets in my praise. I'd rather hev newrolgy, or corns, than ter hev a poem writ about me. I don't want ter go down ter my grave with no blot on my name," sez I.

"She was an artom wrathy at fust, but she got over it an' writ her effusion on my fifth cousin, Peregrine Yellowbird. It throwed him inter a slow decline, an' he suffered like hurl-y, but the poem was fluently burnt up. Arter that he picked up amazin', an' weighed up'ards o' three hundred the last time I saw him."

Peters advanced to the group.

"Our friends on the other side of the stream are making strong efforts to cross, and I think we ought to help them," he announced.

"We'll do it, an' we'll soon hev daylight," replied the mountaineer, looking upward.

He was right; night was slowly retreating; and with the coming of day the hopes of the passengers increased.

The men adjourned to the vicinity of the stream. Formed, as it was, wholly by the storm, it was decreasing fast now that the supply was exhausted. Day dawned, and the combined party soon discovered that there was a way to check what remained of the stream. A very little digging would direct the water elsewhere, and the large force of men on the other side brought their spades into use.

By nine o'clock the work was done, and any one could cross in front of the engine.

The leader of the rescue party then made his report. He had been at work with his force for many hours, but the damage had been widespread, and some of the rivers so impassable that he had not been able to reach the storm-bound travelers, or send them any word. The way of escape was at last open; they had only to walk half a mile, and there a train would be found waiting to carry them forward on their journey.

It was believed that by prompt action they could reach the next town, lay over long enough to dine satisfactorily, and then continue their journey west on the time of a regular train.

There was no voice raised in objection. The travelers were weary, disgusted and ill-tempered, and the chance of getting away encouraged them greatly. They had seen enough of their storm-prison to last them a long time.

The departure was made as soon as possible.

Ballard tried to say a few words in private to Leonice, but the vigilance of Whiting and Arlington prevented it. Their party had formed again as before, but the old condition of affairs would never be resumed. Leonice was cold in her manner toward the judge and Arlington, and they were angry and worried.

Arlington, in particular, was troubled as to the future. Central Pacific Paul knew him to be "Blonde Pete," the gambler, and he was very much afraid that he would be arrested for his share in the late trouble. Past experience showed him that officers were glad to seize him upon any pretext.

Whatever Ballard intended to do, he gave no sign. He kept away from Whiting's party, but he and Leonice managed to exchange glances which told her that her new friend had not forgotten her.

The journey to the waiting train was begun. It was disagreeable for all, owing to the mud, but it was successfully made. The train was entered, and the long-interrupted journey resumed. Ballard had no work to occupy his time—Jake Blade and the other prisoners having escaped during the attack on the wreckers—and he and Yank took positions at the rear of the car in which Whiting and his party rode.

The next town was reached at two o'clock. Here a stop was made, and the hungry travelers adjourned to the combined depot and hotel to partake of needed refreshments. Their food, when on the train, though abundant, had been far from satisfactory.

Everything went smoothly for a while, and there was no sign of the coming storm. The passengers expected to "eat their fill and go on their way rejoicing." Judge Whiting had heard that a movement was on foot to pursue the wreckers, and he devoutly hoped that Central Pacific Paul would soon disappear forever from his gaze. Vaughan was gone—thanks to Jeffreys—and one more absentee would make the judge far happier.

The dinner was over, and a railroad employee

appeared and announced that the train would start in ten minutes from the platform just outside the dining-room.

"We will get ready at once, and secure good seats in the car," observed the judge.

Madam Pulaski began her preparations, but Leonice did not stir.

"Make haste, my dear," directed Whiting, pleasantly.

"There is no need of haste on my part," calmly replied Leonice. "I am not going on the train!"

"What?" Whiting cried.

"I shall stay here."

"What in the world do you mean?"

"Simply that I am going no further. I shall remain here until a train goes the other way, and then return East."

Whiting's face grew rigid with anger.

"Girl, are you mad?" he exclaimed.

"I am not mad enough to trust myself further with you and Heber Arlington. I have had a glimpse of your real characters, and I decline to keep you company any longer. We will say good-by, and you can go on the train."

Her steady composure frightened Whiting.

"My dear child," he expostulated, "you don't know what you are saying. I may have been hasty when we were in the storm-trap, and I certainly erred in trusting the scoundrel who proved to be Garrett Jeffreys; but I can explain all to your satisfaction. Come! the train will soon start. Come aboard, and I will show you that you are mistaken."

"Never mind the explanation."

"But, my dear—"

"You are wasting words. I am firmly resolved not to go on the train. As for you, you have barely time to get it. Go, sir, and write me when you reach California."

The judge looked wildly toward the train, and then back at the fair rebel.

"Will you come?" he almost groaned.

"You compel me to put my answer in plain words," the girl firmly returned. "Briefly, I will not go on the train!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

LEONICE'S CHAMPION.

ARLINGTON spoke for the first time.

"You forget, judge," he said, "that you are Miss Ross's guardian. As such, you can exact obedience."

"That is a fact," Whiting eagerly added.

"Leonice, you owe obedience to me, as Arlington says. I direct you to go to the car. Yes, I command it!"

He added the last words as he saw that another refusal was ready.

"You both forget more than you remember," calmly answered Leonice. "Bear in mind that your guardianship is one of courtesy and nothing more. Legally, I am my own mistress, and mistress of my actions. You were appointed my guardian because my poor father wished me to have an experienced, honorable man to take care of me. I have found that you are not that, and I terminate our business connection now and forever!"

And this was the girl whom Margaret Pulaski had thought devoid of all firmness!

Whiting thought of the elder lady then, and turned to her in despair.

"Madam," he exclaimed, almost frantically, "use your persuasion here. I command you to induce this mad girl to go on the train!"

There was one whom he could bully, and his voice sounded sharply, peremptorily, insolently.

Margaret had been listening with breathless interest, her dusky eyes looking blacker and larger than ever, but the judge's fierce order made her start nervously. She devoutly hoped that Leonice would be firm, yet she dared not say a word in her behalf. There was one from whom the girl obtained support, silent though it was. Paul Ballard was the only one of the passengers except the Whiting party left in the room. He was listening to all, though no one but Leonice knew it. He could not interfere, but his face expressed deep sympathy which encouraged her.

She answered Whiting's last words quickly:

"Madam Pulaski need not urge me—it will do no good."

At that moment the warning call, "All aboard!" was heard. It stung Whiting to a fury.

"For the last time, will you go?" he demanded.

"I will not go."

With a quick bound the judge seized the girl. He was not in a mood to study consequences, but was determined to get her on the train at all hazards. Winding his strong arms around her, he half-carried, half-dragged her from the room to the railroad platform outside. The conductor was giving the signal to start the train; there was not a moment to be lost.

The judge fixed his gaze upon the nearest car and pressed forward, while Leonice resisted in vain.

Madam Pulaski looked on in dumb anguish. All her sympathies were with the girl, but she dared not interfere.

It was a crisis in several lives.

Leonice called faintly for help—and help came. Whiting suddenly found his way barred

by a muscular figure; a strong hand grasped him by the collar; and his progress was unceremoniously checked. He looked up and saw the hated face of the Overland detective. Once more he was a stumbling-block in the judge's way.

"Halt!" cried Central Pacific Paul, sternly. "This train is not a prison, and takes no unwilling passengers!"

The engine-bell clanged and the train started, but Judge Whiting was left on the platform. Mechanically he released his hold upon Leonice, who hastily retreated to a safe distance, but Whiting stood gazing at Ballard in passion too deep for utterance.

Arlington's hand had fallen to his hip-pocket, but he removed it quickly as he saw the detective's gaze fixed meaningfully upon him. Bold knave that he was, the gambler was afraid of Ballard.

"You scoundrel!" gasped Whiting, "how dare you meddle here?"

"I interfere in the name of law."

"Do you call it law to assault—"

"Enough!" sternly interrupted Ballard; "I am tired of hearing you prate in these stereotyped words. If you have one word of fault to find with me; if there is one point you want settled by a tribunal of law; if you want to know whether you will be allowed to compel a lady to take a train when she is not willing, go with me to the authorities here. I think we can show you all the law you crave!"

"The law of Judge Lynch!" snarled Whiting; "The law of desperadoes—"

"Be silent, sir; I will hear no more. This is a peaceful, law-abiding town, ruled by honest men. That is just why you need to fear them. You want to carry your peculiar plans forward with talk and bluster, riding over every one who don't kneel at your feet. I have heard enough talk. Shall we go to an officer of law?—I don't care who; any one from the mayor down to a policeman, if there is one, will suit me."

Whiting was at the end of his rope, and he saw it plainly. The train was disappearing from sight around a bend in the track, and he and his party were left over.

"I decline to talk with you further," he stiffly answered, as he turned away. "Leonice, we cannot speak in public—will you go to a private room with Madam Pulaski and me?"

The girl hesitated a moment.

"If you wish," she then answered, "but I shall not be able to give you much time!"

Whiting frowned. What a change a few days had made! A short time before he was Leonice's trusted friend and adviser; now she was opposing all his wishes, and seemed to think it a hardship to give him a few moments in her company.

"Let us go up-stairs, then," he answered, as amiably as possible.

Leonice advanced to where Ballard stood.

"Thank you very much for helping me," she said; and her look and voice repaid him for all he had done.

"I am glad to have been of service to you."

"Are you going to remain here awhile?"

"Yes."

"I want to see you again, anon."

"I will wait until I hear from you."

"I am not sure but they will try to kidnap me again," the girl added, lowering her voice.

"They will succeed as poorly as they did this time. Regard me as a guard, or something of that sort, set here to protect you. They can't take you from the building unseen by me, and if they molest you while inside, you have only to call for help and I will respond."

"Thank you—thank you very much," Leonice answered, earnestly. "I will not forget your kindness."

A look was exchanged between them, and then she turned away. Whiting was regarding her with a scowl, but she paid no attention to him. Smiling brightly upon Madam Pulaski, she took that lady's arm and added:

"We will go up-stairs."

They went, Leonice utterly ignoring Whiting and Arlington. The plotters slowly followed, talking as they went. Ballard saw them look back at him with unconcealed enmity as they disappeared, but it pleased rather than troubled him.

With almost every minute he was receiving fresh proof that he was acting wisely to array himself as Leonice's champion against them. "Blonde Pete" he already knew by reputation, and he was confident that the judge was no better than his confederate.

Paul began to pace the platform. Some distance away he saw Yank Yellowbird sauntering about with Moses following gravely at his heels. Van T. Stuyvesant Bliss made his reappearance from his chamber, clad, this time, in a light-hued, check-patterned suit of clothes and a flaming red necktie. Mr. Bliss was one of a dozen passengers who had stopped over, and now that he had dressed in such a "stunning" suit, he felt at peace with the whole world.

He tried to talk with Paul, but finding the detective unsocial, he walked away through the village.

Paul was uneasy. What was transpiring up-stairs?

He was anxious about Leonice. He hoped that no harm would be done by her enemies, but believed them capable of any lawless deed.

Back and forth he walked on the platform for some time, but the fear that Whiting would in some manner outwit him, and get Leonice away by the rear of the hotel, led him to see a servant and, paying him well, get his co-operation. The man agreed to look out for the rear, and then Ballard had to think of the front only.

He resumed his steady tramp, looking up at the second-floor windows now and then.

An hour—two hours passed.

For some time the detective had been growing uneasy, and his fears were no longer to be resisted. Not a sign had come from above, and he felt that it was time to know something about the state of affairs. Night was near at hand, and the opportunities for mischief would then be greatly increased. He considered how he could learn what was transpiring in the private room, and soon formed a plan.

He was about to re-enter the building when one of the servants passed out, but Ballard gave him only a casual glance.

The man went away, and Paul sought the employee he had before enlisted in his service. A short conversation with this man resulted in the wife of the ally being summoned. She was the hotel cook.

"Your husband has told you that I want to hire you to help me, hasn't he?" Paul asked, pleasantly.

"He has, sir," the woman replied.

"The work is very simple. I want to know what the four persons in the private room are doing—whether there are any signs that the young lady is being deprived of her liberty. Would it excite wonder if you went to the room and announced that supper would be ready at a certain time?"

"Oh! no."

"Will you do it, and, while there, carefully notice everything you can?" and Paul displayed a gold piece.

"I can give you one item right away," quickly returned the woman. "The tall man has sent out for some laudanum, by Abiel Parsons."

"Sent for what?" demanded Ballard, sharply.

CHAPTER XXV.

PLOTS AND COUNTERPLOTS.

The statement had startled the detective.

"The tall man has sent Abiel for some laudanum," the woman repeated.

"Do you mean Whiting?" Ballard asked.

"Yes."

"What does he want of laudanum?"

"I don't know."

"Was Abiel Parsons the waiter whom I met at the door as I came in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did Whiting call him into their room to give the message to him?"

"No; and that is what makes me suspicious. He came out and cornered Abiel on the sly, asking him if anybody could overhear them. Abiel said no, but he was wrong—I was near, unbeknown to him, and I heard part of it. Whiting asked him if he could get some laudanum and not let anybody know of it; and then he got some money out of his pocket and jingled it. Abiel is greedy, and he's unscrupulous; and he said right off that he could do all that the tall man wanted done. I didn't hear what he did want, for they lowered their voices, but they had a long talk, and then Abiel took the money and went out."

Ballard heard this story with fresh suspicion. Everything pointed to some new plot on Whiting's part. If he had wanted the laudanum for any ordinary or honest purpose, he would not have used any secrecy.

Remembering that Abiel Parsons was the man who waited upon the table, the plot became plain. It would be easy for the man to drop some of the laudanum into the coffee, and then Whiting would have a better chance to carry out whatever scheme was in his mind.

"What is your name, madam?" Ballard politely asked.

"Mrs. Hobbs, sir."

"Well, Mrs. Hobbs, that man up-stairs is a villain, and his friend, Arlington, is off the same piece. They have some iniquitous plot against the young lady in their charge, and it is plain that they intend to give the laudanum to her. My duty, as well as common honor, requires me to foil them. May I count upon you to help me?"

"Yes, sir; you may."

Mrs. Hobbs answered with emphasis. She had not the most tender heart in the world, but the fine-looking detective had given her husband money—and was probably to give more—while Whiting had given his money to Abiel Parsons. Mrs. Hobbs was by no means a stupid woman, and she at once became a strong partisan of the man who put out his money in what she considered the proper way.

"Go to the private room, then," continued Paul, "and tell them at what hour supper will be ready, and, while there, notice all that you can."

"I'll do it, sir; and if that man means harm to the poor young lamb with the pretty face, I'll do my best to baffle his antiques schemes."

Between a high sense of honor and just pride at the ease with which she had used the long adjective, Mrs. Hobbs held her head very high as she sailed away. She was gone but a few minutes, but when she returned her expression was sober and vexed.

"What do you suppose that wretch said?" she demanded.

"What did he say?"

"I told him supper would be ready at six o'clock, and then says he, short and uncivil: 'We will have our supper served in this room at seven o'clock, sharp. I have made arrangements with Parsons to bring it up.' I declare, sir, I could have fallen on the mean thing and scratched his eyes out with pleasure. Made arrangements with Abiel Parsons, indeed! Who is Abiel Parsons, anyway? Nobody but a waiter, and now that the landlord is away, my husband and I are in charge here."

Ballard scarcely heard the closing sentences; his mind was wholly upon the more important part which had gone before. Whiting had sent secretly by Parsons for laudanum, and he intended to have the same person bring the supper to the private room.

"Do you see the drift of all this?" Paul sternly asked.

"Of what?"

"Parsons is to pour the laudanum into some article of drink or food, as he carries it up, and arrange matters so that the right person, or persons, will be drugged."

"The wretch!" cried Mrs. Hobbs, raising both hands.

"Shall we allow it?"

"I shall never sleep again if we do."

"I am glad to see that you are such an honorable woman, and we will do our best to foil the plotters. But how are we to do it?"

"Great land! I don't know," confessed Mrs. Hobbs.

"We must find a way, but we are forgetting one thing. Did you observe the persons in the room while you were there?"

"I did, sir."

"Tell me all about it."

"Well, when I knocked somebody said 'Come in!' I did so, quick. I know now it was Arlington who spoke, and that Whiting was mad because he did so. The old one was moving toward the door fast, to talk with me through a tiny space, I dare say; but I was too quick for him. I got in."

"How did they all look?"

"The men looked that sulky and ugly they could bite a nail in two, and the oldest lady, she was as sad as though she was at a funeral."

"But the young lady?"

"The calmest one there, sir."

"Is that so?" asked Paul, greatly puzzled.

"True as the Bible, and reading a book as happy and contented as a lamb. Leastways," added Mrs. Hobbs, with sudden energy, "that's how she looked, but I don't believe it."

"Why don't you believe it?"

"It ain't natural."

"Did she look at you?"

"Critically, sir; critically."

"And she did not seem to be in trouble?"

"She gave no sign of it."

The detective was silent for several seconds. He felt sure that Mrs. Hobbs was telling the truth, but her report surprised him. He could account for Leonice's composure—she must be very composed if she could amuse herself with a book—in only one way, and he would not believe that theory to be correct; he would not believe, after her brave resistance to Whiting's will, that she had been hoodwinked and cajoled into submission.

"You say the word," pursued Mrs. Hobbs, "and that laudanum will never do any harm."

"How so?"

"Abiel Parsons is sharper than I think if he can keep it away from me until seven o'clock."

"Do you mean that you think you can purloin it?"

"I can steal it!" affirmed Mrs. Hobbs, resolutely.

"I doubt it. He will undoubtedly keep it on his person until the time to use it—"

"You don't know Abiel; he ain't so sharp as you and me. The first thing he does when he gets back will be to hide that bottle somewhere; and the first thing I shall do will be to pour out the laudanum and fill it with sweetened water!"

"Bravo! You shall be handsomely paid if you can do that, Mrs. Hobbs—but I still doubt it."

"That is because you don't know ME!" replied the lady, with serene confidence. "You shall see that I will do just what I say. Anyways, give me a chance. My husband, Joseph, will watch to see that the drug ain't delivered to Whiting ahead of time."

Ballard grew more hopeful. Skillful detective that he was he found Mrs. Hobbs's confidence contagious, and as he could see no other way, he readily agreed to let her try her plan.

Abiel was liable to return at any time, so they separated and Ballard returned to the platform. He looked up at the windows of the pri-

vate room. He was puzzled and worried. Despite the report of Leonice's calmness he retained full confidence in her. He did not believe that she had receded from her original position, but was firmly convinced that some plot was afloat against her. What was it?

Darkness was at hand, and the chances for the judge to work mischief would be increased. Night and evil deeds go hand in hand, and he believed Whiting capable of anything.

Yank Yellowbird came sauntering back with Moses at his heels, as usual.

"Have you satisfied your curiosity?" asked Paul, absently, referring to the mountaineer's trip to explore the village.

"I've come back ter satisfy it," Nevermiss answered, with a smile.

"In what way?"

"Didn't know but you was goin' ter be married."

"Absurd!" replied Paul, with some irritation.

"Mebbe you're right; but I seen one o' the hotel-waiters talkin' at a door with a man who looked like a parson, as I was walkin' along, an' I heerd somethin' about a marriage at the hotel at nine o'clock this evenin'."

Ballard had become suddenly attentive.

"Are you in earnest, Yank?" he demanded.

"To be sure."

"Who was this waiter of whom you speak?"

"It was the cross-eyed critter who trotted in the eatables when we had dinner."

"Abiel Parsons?"

"I b'lieve they call him 'Biel, or suthin' like it."

"Are you sure the man he was talking with was a minister?"

"No; but he sorter looked like it, an' he was ter be present. 'Biel had come ter engage him—he must 'a' been a parson."

"Can you describe the house where they were?"

"I consait so."

Ballard called Hobbs, and the house was described. Hobbs at once recognized it as the residence of the Reverend Job Smithson. On being asked what the minister's character was, the informant gave it as his opinion that Smithson was "a wolf in lamb's clothes," and a man not above any dishonorable act.

The detective was freshly excited, though he did not betray his feelings. He was building upon circumstantial evidence, but he thought that he saw Whiting's plot at last. Leonice was to be drugged, and, while in an irresponsible condition, married to some one. And here Heber Arlington again came prominently to the front.

Driven to the wall by Leonice's rebellion, the judge had formed a scheme which would perhaps put her wholly in his power.

"He has left me out of the combination," thought Paul, while his interest and zeal redoubled. "If this is his plot, I must find a way to baffle it; he will find that Leonice is not without friends in this crisis!"

Surely, the girl had need of friends.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TWO LETTERS.

CENTRAL PACIFIC PAUL now had good cause to do some careful thinking and planning. Despite the circumstantial evidence against Whiting, there was a lack of positive proof, and even if such proof had existed, matters were not on a footing so that he could boldly interfere.

We must meet the judge with his own weapons.

He confided his theories to Yank, and asked his co-operation, and soon found that he had not asked in vain. The tall mountaineer was indignant, and he expressed his opinion of Whiting in his own peculiar way. Furthermore, he declared that he was ready to devote his time to aiding Ballard as long as the latter desired.

While they were talking, the waiter, Abiel Parsons, passed in, but they avoided looking at him in a direct way, and no remarks were made in his hearing.

He had been gone inside only a short time when Paul noticed a piece of white paper whirling in the air, the plaything of an eccentric wind that dallied with it as the wind will at times; and, after a good deal of indecision, finally allowed it to fall almost at the detective's feet. Then he noticed for the first time that the paper was folded carefully, and the reflection that it had come from the direction of Leonice's prison-room caused him to pick it up quickly.

There, plainly written on one side, was this address:

"MR. PAUL BALLARD,

"At the Hotel.

"PLEASE FORWARD."

It was the handwriting of a lady.

Hurriedly the detective opened the paper. It was not large—only a leaf from a diary—but it was covered with writing, and this is what he read:

"MR. BALLARD:—I hope you are not losing faith in my firmness, but I have had no chance to communicate with you; a peculiar state of affairs exists here, and I am practically a prisoner. I have no space to

write what Mr. Whiting has said, so I will briefly tell of what it consists. First, stout assertions that he means me well; secondly, earnest pleas that I will remain with him and trust him; thirdly, warnings of the dangers that will confront me if I sever connection with him; and, fourthly, a proposition to this effect: He will give me until morning to decide, and such decision shall be formed of my own free will. He 'hopes I will go on to the coast' with them in the morning, but if I decide not to, I can do as I please. All this in case I remain in my room to-night, and let no person influence me; but he is bitterly opposed to you, Mr. Ballard, and declares that if I see, or consult you, he will put the case in the hands of law, and abide by the issue.

"The result of all this has been a truce. I shudder to think of public trouble, and I have agreed to submit to retirement here for to-night.

"It was a Judas bargain. For my own part I determined, at the start, to communicate with you, and I am taking my first steps now. For an hour I have been reading (?) that old, reliable book, 'Jane Eyre,' with great diligence. Having read it once in the past, I should hesitate to go over the harrowing, gloomy, horrible record of persecution, sorrow and despair again under any conditions, and my reading is now a farce. For once, however, I like 'Jane Eyre;' it is aiding me to deceive my enemies, and while apparently absorbed in perusing it, I am slyly writing this note on its pages, a few words at a time. When written, I shall manage to drop the note from the window, hoping you will get it.

"This is my Judas act—now, what is Whiting's?"

"I am positive that he means treachery! I can see it in his face and in Arlington's. They have asked me to delay action until morning, not, as they claimed, to give me time to think, but in order that they may carry out some hostile scheme of which I know not the nature. That some plot is threatening me I feel sure. What is it? I do not know, and I am helpless.

"Now, Mr. Ballard, if I am not tiring your patience beyond all limits, may I ask advice from you? Will you tell me this: Shall I defy Whiting and insist on leaving this room, and thereby expose myself to the town curiosity and gossip? Or shall I remain quiet and try to guard against any scheme they may have? Please advise me.

"On the table down-stairs are several books. One of them is 'David Copperfield.' At half-past six I shall have a servant called; I shall ask that that particular book be brought up here for me to read; and I hope to find in it a note from you—say, at page 99. I hope I shall not look in vain.

"If you are not weary of me and my troubles, please advise me. LEONICE ROSS."

Central Pacific Paul read to the last word with breathless attention. Weary of her! Steady-headed detective that he was, he felt like pressing the note to his lips. Had it not touched her hands? Was it not her note to him?

He put sentiment aside, though he could not banish admiration. The reading of the book, which had seemed so strange, was explained, and it was clear that Leonice was equally shrewd and brave.

Could she have read Paul's mind she would not have had any doubt as to whether he would aid her. Perhaps she did read it; the instinct of women is more acute and discriminating in affairs of the heart than the judgment of men.

Mrs. Hobbs appeared.

"I've got it!" she said, with emphasis.

"The laudanum—"

"I have, sir."

She nodded her head violently and exhibited a vial. Label and odor alike proclaimed it the drug she had mentioned.

"I told you Abiel was stupid, and it has come out just as I said," she added. "He hid the bottle, and I have unbid it. Now, I want you to see me with your own eyes change the contents."

Ballard was elated, and he followed her to the kitchen. She would have poured out the laudanum, but he was wise enough to save it in another vial. Then the original vial was carefully washed and filled with water sweetened with harmless sugar until it was of the proper color.

"I defy anybody to tell the difference by sight," declared Mrs. Hobbs.

"There is one thing to do."

"What is that?"

"The lack of odor might now betray the cheat. We must cover the outside of the vial with some of the laudanum."

"That's easy done."

"Where did Parsons hide it?"

"Under some rags in the closet."

"It will also be well to put some laudanum on the rags. The odor must be there, or Parsons may be led by suspicion to touch his tongue to the liquid."

"That's so, sir. I think you and me is too much for them schemers. You have a good head, and I am no fool, if I do say it."

"You certainly are not, Mrs. Hobbs; your woman's wit is admirable."

Mrs. Hobbs's eyes sparkled. She liked the compliment, and her devotion to the cause she had engaged in grew even stronger than before.

When all was finished Paul went back to Yank. He must write the answer to Leonice and put it in the book, and the mountaineer's advice was desired on one point. Paul was of the opinion that it would be best to let the supposed attempt to marry Leonice go on to the crisis, and then interrupt, expose Whiting, and give him his choice between arrest and prompt departure from the town.

The plan was explained to Nevermiss.

"A weddin' is a del'kit p'int ter advise on," replied Yank, gravely, as he stroked his thin

beard. "They ain't like other things, an' they be egregious funny circumstances. I've had a heap o' experience with 'em fur a bachelor, though I never mixed with one when I could help it. They're atrocious hard on the nerves. When my cousin, Issachar Yellowbird, was married, he was so condemn'd skeered that he got weak in ther knees, an' I had ter hold him up by main strength. It was mortal hard on me, fur I was nigh as much alarmed as he. The weak sister tried ter run off, the newrology was awful in my j'int, an' the p'rasperation coozed out o' ev'ry pore. Issachar an' me both lived through it, though I was in poor health fur a month after, owin' ter the skeer. I s'pose my antipathy ter weddin's begun with the malign influence o' the union o' my sister, Hopeful Patience, ter Elnathan Meek when I's young.

"I declar', Paul, I never seen sech an egregious mournful 'casion in my life. Thar was up'ards o' forty old women thar, an' they was all weepin' like hurley, as women will on sech occasions. I couldn't onderstan' it, an' I went ter my gran'marm fur information.

"Is Hopeful sorry she made the bargain?" sez I.

"No, child, she's overjoyed," sez my gran'marm.

"Then I don't see as the other women hev any cause ter shed tears copious," sez I. "Be they sorry they didn't git that long-legged, slab-sided, homely Elnathan Meek?" sez I.

"Hush, child," sez she; "we are all very glad fur your dear sister, but she is about ter inter on a new spear o' life."

"Who's she goin' ter spear?" sez I.

"Oh, you can't onderstand now, sweet child," sez my gran'marm, benignant, while she wiped her eyes—they was already as pink as red clover, her eyes was. "Your sister is happy," sez she, "an' so be we, an' we wish her joy; but what is Elnathan's gain is our loss. She won't be ours alone no more, an' my gran'marm howled right out loud.

"What on't?" sez I. "I consait Elnathan ain't got no great bargain. Ef she knocks him around as she does me, an' sasses him as she does the whole o' the Yellowbirds, I reckon he won't crow over us. You an' she fights like hurley," sez I, ter my gran'marm, "an' I don't see why you need ter shed tears. Elnathan is the one we ought ter pity, an' I allow we're doin' an egregious good piece o' business ter git red o' Hopeful Patience."

"This was logic worthy o' a Yellowbird," but it didn't suit the temper o' the times. I was hustled out o' the room on the run, an' my maternal parent spilt one o' her new slippers tryin' ter instill repentance inter my mind by way o' my system.

"O' course this weddin' is diff'rent, though, an' ef you say we are ter attend to it, I'm with ye, but b'ar in mind"—here Yank leveled his index finger solemnly at Paul—"that I'm o'posed ter weddin's in gin'ral!"

The mountaineer's whimsical conceits would appear at all crises, and Ballard was not disposed to check him. Having freed his mind Yank was ready to give all due attention to the present case, and after thorough discussion, Paul's plan was decided upon.

The detective wrote the letter to Leonice, making it as brief as possible. He told what was known about the laudanum and suspected about the minister, and then gave her directions how to proceed. The last paragraph asked her to rely implicitly upon the writer, assuring her that he would save her from all harm.

Then the letter was put in the book, and the next act in the drama was anxiously awaited.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PLOT GROWS DEEPER.

AT half-past six there was a call from the private room for a servant. Mrs. Hobbs had previously determined to be the one to answer, and she was. She went at once to the door, and received the message from Madam Pulaski. Miss Ross wished for something to read, and, having seen a copy of 'David Copperfield' on the table down-stairs, she would like it, if there was no objection.

Mrs. Hobbs replied with dignity that the book was free to all guests, and that she would bring it. She did so, and it was delivered to Leonice with Central Pacific Paul's letter resting side by side with page 99.

The next interesting point was when Abiel Parsons carried up the supper. Paul watched him closely, and he was seen to take the hidden vial out of the closet, measure out a quantity of the liquid and pour into one of the cups of coffee—and one only. Then he went up-stairs.

Ballard did not consider it safe to watch any further, but he did not doubt that the supposed-to-be-drugged coffee was given Leonice. Whiting had probably calculated on quantity so as to make her dull and apathetic, without causing her to sleep.

Another period of waiting followed. According to what Yank had overheard the wedding was set for nine o'clock. The detective wished it was sooner, so as to have it over. There was a good deal of uncertainty as to the result—

Ballard had directed Leonice to feign a sleepy appearance, to ward off suspicion, but there was no certainty that she would be able to deceive her enemies. The only evidence on that point was her past actions, all of which went to show her capable of a good deal.

While Paul was meditating on all this Abiel Parsons again passed out of the hotel. When Paul saw him turn toward the same quarter he had before visited, suspicion was freshly aroused, and after a moment's thought the detective determined to follow him.

Abiel had the reputation of not being very shrewd, and the darkness was in Paul's favor. Stepping quickly inside he laid away his derby hat and replaced it with a broad-brimmed, soft one which he found hanging there.

Then he pursued, using all the care he could.

Abiel looked around once, but seemed unsuspecting. He went first to the minister's, and talked for a few moments with that person. Paul was not near enough to hear their conversation, but he caught Smithson's last words: "I'll be there at nine o'clock."

The messenger went on again, but soon stopped at what was plainly a livery-stable. A man met him at the door, and Ballard stepped behind a stray wagon and listened.

"Hullo, 'Biel!" saluted the owner of the place.

"How do you come on?"

"All right, Mr. Hughes. Have you got a carriage and a span, with a man to drive, for to night?"

"Where to?"

"Hangman's Run."

"Who wants 'em?"

"A couple over at the hotel."

"My man is to drive them to the Run—and what then?"

"Leave them there, and come back alone."

"That's all right; they can have the outfit, of course."

"You see, Hughes," explained Abiel, confidentially, "it is to be an elopement. A young couple is going to get married, and then skip out and leave the old gent who is guardian of the girl."

"Strangers here?"

"Yes. The old party is named Whiting, and the lovee is named Arlington. They're all from the East."

"Kerrect! Well, we'll give Cupid a lift."

"The outfit is to wait here, and they will come right here to take the carriage. Have it all ready, with horses in, and so they can start without a second's delay."

"Just so. I'll do it, 'Biel, and now be off with you. I have business to 'tend to."

Abiel went away. Ballard followed again, but no longer closely. His mind was full of exciting thoughts; Whiting's plot had risen to new dignity, and it had grown both additionally mysterious and fascinatingly interesting. What did it mean? Who was about to "elope?" It must be Arlington and Leonice, but Paul could almost have sworn that it was the judge who had ordered the team. Plainly, he had some deep plot in which he wanted to play a peculiar role.

The suspense was growing keen, but Paul never wavered in his determination to save Leonice. The mystery of the "elopement" would be solved in due time, strange as it appeared. He followed Parsons back to the depot-hotel, and, finding Bliss and Yank in conversation on the platform, he paused to hear what they were saying.

"Was your family a large one?" asked Bliss.

"Consider'bly so," Yank replied.

"How many children, please?"

"Don't know that I ever counted 'em."

"Well, just mention them, and I will take down the names;" and out came Mr. Bliss's ready book.

"All right, but mind yer spellin'; the Yellowbirds is all dreadful set on correck spellin'. My Uncle, Zedekiah, disinherited his son, Diogenes, 'cause he spelled 'Egypt' E-g-i-p."

"I will try not to offend, friend Yellowbird. Now for the names of your brothers and sisters."

"Jes' so. Wal, Hezekiah was the fu'st one, which was because he was the smartest, watched his chance an' got on ter the family record as the fu'st child an' heir; an' then comes these in order."

Yank gravely counted off the names upon his fingers.

"Thar was nextly Micah, Jedediah, Elijah, Absalom, Nehemiah, Bartholomew, Philander, Zaccheus, Eliakim, Abiathar, Eliphalet—"

"Wait, please," interrupted Mr. Bliss. "You were going to name the children in order. Were there no girls?"

"One, an' she comes next. Let me go on with the list. Susannah, Nicodemus, Azephureth, Claude, Job, Archelaus an' Methuselah. That's all."

"Nineteen children, and only one girl among them!" gasped Bliss.

"Too bad, wa'n't it?" and Yank shook his head mournfully.

"But you haven't mentioned yourself."

"That so? I made a slip then. I come in between Azephureth an' Claude."

"Your first name, of course, is a *sobriquet*."

"A what?"

"A *sobriquet*—a *nom du guerre*—a name peculiar to the eccentric West."

"It may be; yes, by burley, it may be, but I dunno no more about it than a Choctaw Injun. I'm stuck."

"I mean that your first name, 'Yank,' is one given you sportively by your fellow mountaineers; an assumed name, you see. What is your real name?"

"Mister," quoth Yank, warmly, "do you think I'm an atrocious hoss-thief, ter hev ter sail under a false name? Do ye think—"

"My dear sir," exclaimed Mr. Bliss, in alarm, "you wrong me; I did not so mean, but something quite different. Here in the West we have such names as 'Black Ben,' 'Grizzly Tom,' and the like; and as 'Yank' is such an odd name I thought it must have been given you as a joke—"

"It wa'n't no joke at all; at least, not fur my next youngest brother. You see, thar was contentions in the Yellowbird family as ter what I should be named, my mother insistin' upon Zebedee, an' my father bein' sot on Adoniram, an' I hadn't b'en named when the next son was born. I wa'n't but a year old then, but I had a pugilistic temper, an' I took a dislike ter the baby; so one day I stumped him ter go out in the lot back o' the house an' fight me, an' when he wouldn't do it, an' sassed me, I yanked him off his high chair an' scratched his face mortal bad. That's how we both got our names. They called me Yank 'cause I yanked him off the chair; an' called him Claude because I clawed him so."

The genealogical investigator stared at Yank in wild uncertainty.

"You say you were only one year old then?"

"To be sure."

"And your brother was still younger?"

"Aged one month an' five days," placidly replied Nevermiss.

"And you challenged him to go outside and fight, and be 'sassed' you?"

"Called me a contumelious ignoramus!" quoth the mountaineer, with injured dignity. "He was too free with his tongue fur one o' his age."

Bliss shook his head in bewildered dismay, but managed to rally.

"So you were really christened Yank," he resumed, "or perhaps you were not christened?"

"I was. The minister an' seven old women was asked in to take part in the ceremony, but that mornin' I fell inter a b'iler full o' hot water an' wa'n't diskivered fur three hours. My mother an' the old women, hunted high an' low fur me, while the minister sot in the kitchen an' read 'The Saints' Rest,' but I do b'lieve they'd never found me ef my mother hadn't took off the kiver o' the b'iler ter put in her washin'. Thar I was, b'ilin' like burley, an' red as a lobster. They pulled me out with the tongs, the water was so p'ison hot, an' then the minister said he guessed I didn't need no more christenin'; so he'd only charge half-price an' let me go as I was. I hate ter confess it, but while they was talkin' I put his stove-pipe hat in the oven, an' the egregious thing was all burnt ter a coal."

"This is terrible!" ejaculated Bliss.

"I know it wa'n't right, an' ef I knowed whar the parson is, I'd buy him a new hat."

"I do not refer to that, but to the idea of your being in the boiling hot water."

"Oh! I didn't go in on purpose."

"But it is impossible to live there."

"It was wet."

"Man, man," cried Bliss, "do you expect me to believe such a story as that?"

Nevermiss turned upon him with a frown.

"Mister," he replied, with dignity, "I consait this interview had better eend right hyar. I'm nat'rally amiable, barrin' a few leetle weaknesses, but I don't 'low no man ter come ter me an' doubt my fam'y traditions. A tribe that dates back ter Adam Yellowbird—him who owned the Garden o' Eden—ain't ter be trod on with impunity, nor with big boots. I consait the best thing you kin do is ter leave me out o' yer book. Anyhow, the book won't be writ ef you cast slurs on my pedigree an' traditions; thar won't be no Van Bliss Stuyvesant left ter do it."

"My dear sir," expostulated the historian, hurriedly, "pray give me a chance to speak. I assure you I had no intention of giving offense, or of casting any doubt on your statements. I believe them all—fully!"

"That's all right, then. Nobody kin ask more, an' we won't hev an artom o' trouble."

Central Pacific Paul now advanced.

"Mountaineer, I would like to speak with you in private," he said.

"To be sure. I ain't got no office, so let's walk up the street a bit. My legs are mortal cramped with standin' around."

They went, and Paul explained his latest discoveries and the mystery of the elopement plan. Yank was at first perplexed, but Ballard explained his own views, and it was fully decided that it was a scheme to hoodwink the public. The judge had planned to have Leonice married to Arlington, after which they would go away in the carriage. Whiting would remain and act the part of the indignant and deceived guardian, and, however it might be with Ballard,

the public would probably be blinded by the trick.

No doubt Parsons had been directed to tell as much as he had to the keeper of the livery-stable, so that proof would be at hand that the elopement was a thing of fact.

"They forgit one thing in their egregious plan," said Nevermiss with a nod.

"What is that?"

"That you an' me are som'ers around these parts!"

"Just so, friend Yellowbird. They forget it, or overlook the fact that we have common-sense; but we will remind them of it later. Now let us go back, for the time of the wedding draws near."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WEDDING HOUR.

ABIEL PARSONS knocked at the door of the private room, and Judge Whiting promptly appeared.

"The parson is here, mister," announced Abiel.

"Bring him up at once."

The servant turned away, and Whiting closed the door and looked anxiously toward Leonice. Since supper the girl had been sitting in an easy-chair, her head leaned back and her eyes closed. The pages of "David Copperfield" had lost their charm, and Leonice seemed strangely sleepy. Now and then the judge spoke to her, taking care that she did not fall asleep entirely, but, though she answered, it was only after an effort, and in a dull, absent way.

Whiting was hopeful. He had ordered laudanum as a drug because he had learned that it was the only one he could get, but he had not known just how it would work, nor whether any given quantity would have the desired effect.

Knowing what would surely cause sleep, he had made the quantity less, and the result seemed favorable.

She was now sitting with closed eyes, but a movement of one hand showed that she was not asleep. Whiting and Arlington exchanged glances, and the former then turned to Margaret Pulaski.

"Madam, carry out the directions I have given," he directed, briefly.

Margaret's face was very pale, and her expression was one of mental misery.

"Sir," she answered, nervously, "I beg that you will reconsider and not carry out this plan."

"Are you on that strain again?" angrily asked Whitney.

"I have sinned for you," Margaret replied, "and become party to your plot, but it has reached a point I never anticipated. Judge Whiting, have mercy on that poor girl! She is young and good, and you will ruin her life. Let your better nature be heard and spare her!"

Whiting had glanced at Leonice, but he believed her incapable of understanding what they said.

"You are as sentimental as ever," he coarsely exclaimed.

"I am not without human feeling, I hope."

"Madam, fifty dollars extra if you do this job well."

"Never! I will not touch that, nor even the money named as my salary; it would burn my hands and my soul!"

"Bah! we have had enough of that. Rouse Leonice, and coax her to obey us."

Margaret hesitated.

"Do you hear?" he demanded.

"I hear, but—"

"Then obey! By Heaven, I will not be defied thus! You know the penalty of refusal—go on and do as I direct, or I swear that you shall receive a blow where your mind and heart are the most sensitive. You oppose my will at your peril. Go on!"

He pointed to Leonice, and Margaret moved like a machine, rather than a woman.

"May Heaven forgive me!" Whiting heard her murmur, and he could have struck her in his wrath.

She reached Leonice's side.

"Are you awake, dear?" she tremulously asked.

"Louder, louder!" Whiting commanded. "I hear the parson coming—arouse her at once!"

Margaret increased her efforts, and Leonice finally opened her eyes. She looked dully about her, and brushed her hand across her forehead. Whiting heard the minister at the door, and he stepped forward and lifted the girl to her feet. Arlington admitted the Rev. Job Smithson, and then turned the key in the lock. Leonice looked wonderingly at the persons before her.

"Let the ceremony proceed!" ordered the judge, without a word of greeting to the minister. "Take her hand, Heber, and we'll soon have it over."

The minister, a sanctimonious person, looked benignly at the bride-elect.

"Dear child!" he hypocritically murmured, "she is overcome with emotion on the joyful occasion—"

"Make no unnecessary words!" ordered Whiting. "Go on with the ceremony at once, and we will talk anon."

Arlington had taken Leonice's hand, and it

only needed the usual form to complete the iniquitous work. The girl looked dazed and bewildered, and Arlington smiled triumphantly.

One word spoke the Reverend Job Smithson, and then he was interrupted. Madam Pulaski sprung forward and tore Leonice's hand from Arlington's grasp.

"No, no!" she cried, wildly; "it shall not be; the marriage shall not take place. It would be a profanation and a crime in the sight of Heaven. It shall not be!"

She stood at bay like a wild animal, but her aspect was noble. She had clasped her arms around Leonice, and she faced them all with glorious defiance. Her pallor suddenly disappeared, and the flush of excitement reddened her beautiful cheeks. Her attitude was erect, and her great, dusky eyes glowed like twin stars. She had thrown off the weight of submission at last, and her rebellious air was grand.

"Madam!" harshly, warningly cried the judge.

"You talk in vain!"

"Remember your secret—"

"I will not remember! I will not obey you!"

"By heaven, woman, stand aside or—"

"I will not stand aside. This sacrilegious ceremony shall not take place, and if you lay hand upon Leonice or me, I will alarm the whole house with my cries!"

"Mad woman! you don't know what you say," hissed Whiting.

"I do know, and you may as well understand that I have thrown off the spell of fear you cast upon me. I will be your accomplice in evil no longer."

"Beware!"

"I have counted the cost."

"Remember what I can do to you."

"I remember all, and I dare all. There is One who watches over us all, and guards us as seems best to Him. He will raise a protector for me and mine, even as He now impels me to protect this poor child."

"Fool! fool!" retorted the judge; "you will drive me to something desperate. Stand back, or I will strike you to my feet!"

He raised his clinched hand, but Madam Pulaski did not waver.

"Strike, if you dare," she quickly returned.

"Kill me, if you will—I could die in no better cause. I have been your unwilling accomplice long enough; I will be so no longer. I have rebelled, and I defy you. Strike, if you dare!"

"He dares not strike!"

The words came in a clear, ringing voice from near the door, and all the party turned suddenly. There stood Paul Ballard, Yank Yellowbird and the Hobbs couple, and the first two presented an appearance of indignation which did not speak well for the plotter's future.

"If any man strikes a blow here," added Central Pacific Paul, "he will answer for it dearly!"

"You scoundrel!" roared Whiting, "how dare you—"

He paused as Leonice flitted across the floor and took place beside her defenders, strong, alert, and without the least trace of her late apathy. The metamorphosis was startling to the judge and Arlington.

"Dare!" echoed Paul, scornfully; "it does not require much courage to oppose such wretches as you. Blonde Pete, you need not hunt for your revolver; you know me of old, and I am as ready to meet you in that line of business as any other. Draw your revolver if you wish!"

Evidently Arlington did not wish—or did not dare. The weapon stayed where it was.

Whiting would have tried to bluster the matter through, but the sudden change in Leonice's appearance worried him more than anything else would have done. He began to suspect that he had been made the victim of a trick which overweighed his own scheme.

Rev. Job Smithson came to the front, however.

"Who are you who dare interrupt this sacred ceremony?" he severely asked.

"We are men who will make this town uncomfortably hot for you, if you don't take yourself out of the way and sink into oblivion!" Ballard retorted. "You came here to perform a marriage which, as you know, would be a crime. Thank your lucky stars that you get off so easily and—go!"

The detective pointed to the door.

"Don't do it!" exclaimed Arlington, plucking up a little courage; but the Rev. Job answered hastily:

"I—I don't think I will stay; I am very—ahem!—reluctant to mix in scenes of strife and undue contention. I will, therefore, return to my residence and come again when you have settled this controversy."

The last words were spoken at the door, and, a moment later, the parson disappeared.

"Your turn next," continued Paul, with a keen, sharp, business air, as he looked at Whiting and Arlington. "We give you just ten minutes to get out of town. The sooner you go, the better it will be for you."

"I'll see you in perdition first!" raved the judge. "Do you think you can bully me, simply because you are a detective? I know my rights—"

"Take care that you don't get them! Come, let us have done with idle talk, and then we will see what you had better do. You reprobate, I know your scheme from beginning to end, and I have been waiting to catch you in your own trap. I have corresponded with Miss Ross under your own eyes, and you have not been the wiser. I knew of your laudanum scheme before the drug was in this house, and it was changed for harmless water. That is what Miss Ross had in her coffee, though she simulated a drugged condition to deceive you. Our trap worked well, and you are caught."

"I don't believe it!" began Whiting, but he was interrupted.

"You shall have the story, then!" Ballard exclaimed, and he quickly told all that was necessary.

The plotters were dumfounded; they saw that they were, indeed, in the power of the detective.

"Only one thing is left for you now," continued the detective. "Will you leave town?"

"If Leonice is ready," muttered Whiting.

"Miss Ross, do you wish to go with him?"

"Heaven forbid!" the girl cried. "Judge Whiting, you and I are done forever; nothing can induce me to again keep your company. My poor father little knew what his old-time friend had become when he selected you as my protector, but I know you all too well. We part here forever; go you your way, and I will go mine!"

Whiting's face worked convulsively as he gazed at the fair speaker. All his hopes were going to ruin like the falling walls of a building, and with the once-fair proportions crashing at his feet he was maddened by the wreck.

With a remarkably quick movement he drew a revolver, leveled it at Leonice's heart and pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ROAD TO HANGMAN'S RUN.

THE report sounded dully in the small room, but Leonice remained unharmed. Good as was the aim he had taken, the judge's arm was no longer leveled toward her. It pointed toward the ceiling at an angle, and up there was the hole made by the bullet he had fired.

Just in time his aim had been diverted by a strong hand which seized his arm and forced it upward; and, turning, the would-be murderer looked into the flashing eyes of Yank Yellowbird.

"You atrocious insex!" exclaimed the mountaineer, in a ringing voice, "you deserve ter be dealt with by Judge Lynch—you do, by hurley! Yes, an' you ought ter be thrashed with a hoss-whip. Paul, say the word an' I'll mash him up like a pertater. I never seen sech an egregious insex sence I struck the Central Pacific!"

Ballard had grown pale when he saw Leonice's peril, but he was again himself.

"Perhaps you object to leaving town now?" he asked, in an icy voice.

Just then the whistle of a locomotive sounded outside.

"The evenin' train!" exclaimed Mrs. Hobbs.

"Make them take that an' go on!"

"A mortal good idee," commented Yank.

"I believe you are right," added Paul. "How is it, are you ready to go, men?"

"Say yes," growled Arlington; "it's our only way. I ain't going to stay here and be made a sacrifice of for nothing."

"Speak quickly!" ordered the detective.

"Yes, it is!" groaned Whiting. "I'll go, and may my curse rest on you all!"

"Don't be profanin' too free," cautioned Nevermiss, "or, by hurley, I'll fall on ye an' give my boot a chance fur a polish on them fine broadcloths, or whatsomdever they be. I ain't nat'rally a malevolent insex, but I do hanker ter give you a condemned thrashin'!"

There was no time to lose; the train was at hand; and Yank, without waiting for anything more, "run" the judge out of the room with more speed than ceremony. Ballard bestowed a significant glance upon Blonde Pete, and the gambler followed tamely enough, but there was a wicked glitter in his eyes which told that he was not wholly subdued.

They were just in time for the train; and Whiting and Arlington, escorted by their guard which was not exactly one of honor to them, entered the nearest car. The locomotive drew a deep breath, squared itself for work, and then moved away with the train at its heels.

The plotters were off on their journey.

"I hate egregiously ter have it so," observed Nevermiss. "The atrocious insex deserv'd punishment ef ever folks did—they did, by hurley!"

"I have acted against the dictates of own judgment," Ballard admitted, "but the wishes of Miss Ross prevail. She wished to avoid public trouble, and it may be she is right. All that worries me is the possibility that Whiting and his gambler friend won't give it up so tamely."

"That's the diffikilty, but, as you say, I s'pose we ought ter be guided by what the leetle gal

says; a man who won't sacrifice all his tecknerkel opinions fur a pooty gal don't anount ter nothin'."

"I thought you held other opinions; I remember that you spoke adversely of weddings, and I supposed it was a general antipathy to the female sex."

"So I hev, on general principles, but when it comes ter my own case—land o' Goshen! the rule won't work. I'm fifty years old, beset with malevolent newrology an' a left foot that is a coward, an' divers other infirmities; but I'd fight like hurley fur the female sect, an' worship 'em like a idolizer all the time. All the Yellowbirds are that way, an' I won't go back on my pedigree."

"I understand. Well, the train is out of sight, so let us go in."

They went and found Leonice and Madam Pulaski talking earnestly. There was a period of time during which their general conversation was of more interest to themselves than any one else—consisting, as it did, of thanks from Leonice and general explanations—and then Ballard said:

"Well, Miss Ross, you are rid of your enemies, but you are left in the Far West. May I ask what you intend to do?"

"I have a suggestion to make," quickly answered Madam Pulaski.

"Let us hear it."

"Miss Ross ought to have an escort as far back as St. Louis, one reason being that I don't think we have seen the last of her enemies. I suggest that you and Mr. Yellowbird become that escort."

"You are asking too much!" hastily answered Leonice, her face flushing. "It will be a great trouble to them."

"Not in the least!" declared Paul.

"Not an artom!" asserted Yank, with enthusiasm.

"But your pursuit of Garrett Jeffreys and his men?" continued Madam Pulaski.

Paul's face grew serious.

"I had not thought of that," he confessed.

"Now let me give you a plan," rapidly resumed the clear-minded Madam. "For my own part I have nothing to ask. I have allowed myself to be the accomplice of those wretches, and I deserve nothing. It is not right that I should be with Leonice. I love her dearly," and here the clear voice faltered for a moment, "but I know that I have forfeited all claims to her regard. Leonice, however, demands all our care. Why not let her remain at the hotel until your return from your hostile trip to Jeffreys's haunts, and then escort her East?"

"I can improve on that plan," Paul responded.

"A carriage awaits to take somebody to Hangman's Run, and at that place lives a man and his good wife who would gladly and kindly care for Miss Ross if I asked it. If she remains here Whiting will know just where she is. Why not go to Hangman's Run?"

"A good idea," Margaret agreed.

"I will only go on one condition!" declared Leonice.

"What is that?"

"That you go, too, Madam! You have spoken harshly of yourself when my judgment and your own acts prove you the noblest of women and my devoted friend. You must—you shall go with me!" and she threw her arms around Margaret's neck.

"My dear child!" murmured the elder woman unsteadily, "I do not deserve this."

"You deserve all the kind things I can say of you."

"Mr. Ballard has a clearer view of the case."

"Madam," replied the detective, gravely; "I want to speak of you now. You may think that I was slow in interrupting the painful scene which preceded my entrance to this room, when they were trying to carry on the iniquitous marriage, but I had an object in delaying. Mrs. Hobbs had assured me that the lock of the door was so out of order that we could enter when we chose, and when I saw your noble stand in defense of Miss Ross, I waited to let you show your true feelings. You did so; you acted nobly; and I am convinced that you are the best friend Miss Ross can have; but there is one thing more: You know something of James Whiting's plot. Don't you think you ought to explain?"

"I would if I could, but I only know that it comes of the will made by Leonice's father. That will, or, rather, a supplementary paper of directions—I hardly know what they called it—is not to be read until two years later. Whiting knew, but Leonice does not, what its terms are. It was a peculiar course for a father to take, but Mr. Ross was a peculiar man. Whatever he did in the matter, it made Whiting anxious to get control of Leonice, and I know he lured her West to get her wholly in his power."

"How did you come into the case?"

A look of pain crossed Margaret's face.

"Never mind!" exclaimed Leonice.

"I must—I will explain something," Margaret replied. "I was in Whiting's power—believe me, it was through no fault, no misdemeanor of mine—but he had me in his power, for he held a secret. I dared not disobey him!"

The explanation was incoherent and incomplete, but Leonice firmly interrupted:

"We will hear no more; we have no right to know Madam's private affairs. I know her; I trust and love her. Let that be enough. Madam, you will go with me to the town with the classic name—Hangman's Run."

The queen had spoken, and she ruled the council. There was more to be said, but the result had been foreshadowed. All were of the opinion that it would be well to leave the hotel at once, and it was decided that Leonice, Margaret and Central Pacific Paul should go in the carriage intended for the "elopement."

The plan included Yank in the party, though, as there would be no room for him in the vehicle, he was to go on horseback; but when the horse was looked for, it was found wanting. Horses were scarce in that town, and the keeper of the livery-stable had none that he would let go that night. In the morning he could spare one which had just come in, but was not yet rested.

Yank was not pleased with the idea, and he once spoke of making the trip on foot, but the others overruled him. There was supposed to be absolutely no danger on the road to the Run, and there seemed to be no good reason why he should subject himself to the labor of a long walk for nothing.

This being settled, Ballard, Leonice and Margaret entered the carriage, the driver cracked his whip and they moved away. Yank watched them out of sight and then returned to the hotel with only Moses for company. He had taken the word of those who knew better than he, or ought to have done so, and did not suppose any danger would menace the travelers.

After passing a restless night, owing to the fact that he had to sleep in a "beathenish room," as he expressed it, instead of the open air, he arose at an early hour, had breakfast, went to the stable and obtained the horse, and then took the road to Hangman's Run.

Five miles he rode, without incident, enjoying the scenery, and then a peculiar scene was suddenly presented to his view as he turned a wooded curve in the road. In the middle of the track stood a carriage without attached horses, without visible occupants, without any sign of life. Quickly he rode forward. He had at once been impressed by the fact that the carriage was very much like that in which he had seen his friends the night before, and as he halted beside it, he knew it was the same.

There stood the vehicle, but where were the travelers? He looked sharply at the wooded, gently-rising bluffs. No sign of life there. His gaze fell to the carriage again, and at one point he saw a fresh, white, uneven scar on the black-painted wood.

He knew what that scar meant.

It was the track of a bullet!

Even as he made this discovery a voice sounded only a few yards away, coming from the bank. He rode forward again, and the owner of the voice became visible—a man bound tightly to a tree.

It was the man who had left the town the previous night as driver for Ballard's party.

"In mercy's name, untie me!" he exclaimed, in great trepidation.

Yank was already off the horse. He advanced to the man's side with long steps.

"What's your charges?" he demanded.

"Garrett Jeffreys has got them!"

"What?"

"They was captured by Jeffreys, the train-wrecker."

"Land o' Goshen! what does that mean?"

"We drove right inter them; I don't know any more."

"You say Ballard and the others was took prisoners?"

"Yes."

"Which way did they go?"

"North, along the road."

"Was anybody hurt?"

"I think not, though some shots was fired. I heard Jeffreys tell Ballard he'd take them to the wreckers' village. It is possible they may be found."

"Be found!" cried the mountaineer. "Why, man, of course they will. I'll take the trail immedjit, an' I'll run 'em down ef 'tis in human natur' ter do it—I will, by hurley!"

CHAPTER XXX.

URSULA.

A ROCKY pass, with almost precipitous sides of black, grim rocks; a clatter of hoofs on the hard surface of the winding tunnel which, judging by appearances, had often been used as a road; a derisive laugh which was mellow and musical; and then a clean-limbed horse flashed into sight, bearing a rider, fair and dashing enough to turn a weak head.

She was a girl of less than twenty years, rather below the medium size but perfectly formed, and like some wild bird of paradise that had condescended to dwell for a time among men.

Her face was round, bright and pretty, and her black eyes and waving black hair would have made her a noticeable figure anywhere. Her riding-habit was of gray, profusely trim-

med with scarlet, and, taken all in all, she was a brilliant-appearing equestrienne. A small, richly-ornamented rifle was slung over her shoulder, and a fancifully-shaped bugle hung by her side.

She checked her horse in its hard gallop, looked back, and then waited with an amused smile while a man came galloping after her.

"What! are you there, Jake Blade?" she cried, banteringly.

"I am," dolorously replied he, "an' I thank my patron saint that I'm alive."

"Your 'patron saint!' Your tongue moves wildly. The idea of your having such a thing! Any saint who would take up with you would get expelled from the synagogue in short order!"

"The saint might find worse than me."

"Opinions differ."

"When I have ter foller you I git serious-minded. I don't gin'rally trouble the saint, but when you lead I need a charm ag'in' broken necks."

"Why should you worry, Jake Blade? You are bound to have a broken neck some day. Why not break it on horseback, and save the hangman a job?"

"Come, now, Miss Ursula, you're ha'sh on a feller."

"I know this particular 'feller.'"

"Hope ye don't know no hurt on him."

"Jake," cried the girl, "it would be the easiest thing in the world to balance your book of life! A round thousand evil deeds, and not one good one. Nothing from one thousand leaves what, Jake Blade?"

"See hyar!" roared the man; "ride on, will ye? D'ye want ter drive me crazy? You're a wasp, that's what you be, an' you won't let a feller answer back. You won't even let him swear. I'd like powerful ter ease my mind, but—"

"But Garrett Jeffreys's unhung bravos can't swear in my presence. Just so. I'd take the whip to them if they did. Look you, Jake; you've been in the towns. Have you seen a prettier girl than I?"

"Not one!"

"A better shot?"

"No, sir!"

"A better rider?"

"Nary one."

"One who can speak more readily?"

"No, no! Not by a durned sight!" declared Jake, with comical fervor and promptness.

"Then I'm as good as any of them, if I am Garrett Jeffreys's daughter, and I won't allow any of you black sheep to talk to me except as a queen should be talked to. Do you hear?"

"I reckon so!"

"Do you want to swear now?"

Mr. Blade hesitated.

"Yas, but I won't," he finally replied.

"You hadn't dare?"

"I hadn't by—by gracious!"

"All right, Jakey; you're a good boy, and you shall ride beside me to camp. Come on!"

They rode up the pass. Blade expected every moment to see her give her horse the whip and dash away, but Ursula had satisfied her love of mischief and was demure enough.

They went on harmoniously for several rods, but Jake finally made a discovery.

"Fresh tracks!" he exclaimed, looking at the ground. "Shouldn't wonder ef the cap'n is home."

"I hope so, and I hope he'll send that prisoner of his back among his fellow dandies."

"You don't seem ter like Vaughan."

"Bah!" replied Ursula, briefly.

"Mebbe the cap'n has brought more prisoners."

"The saints forbid!"

"I don't think you need ter worry about Vaughan: Duke Griffin has a finger in that pie, an' he'll make Vaughan crawl inter his den."

"Duke Griffin is a fool!"

Blade grinned broadly. Nothing pleased him more than to hear Ursula abuse others.

"I don't know any one except myself that is not a fool!" added Ursula.

Blade's smile faded away entirely.

They emerged from the pass and entered a valley about two acres in size. A dozen wretched-looking huts were collected at one side while near the center stood two larger buildings. One was the residence of Jeffreys and his daughter, and toward this Ursula at once rode. At the door she sprung to the ground, and then tossed the rein to Blade.

"Take good care of Mercury, or I'll bring out my whip," she declared, by way of farewell.

Then she entered the building she called home. Only two steps did she take before she came to an abrupt, dumfounded stop. She had thought that she might see her father, but what was really revealed to her gaze was as unexpected as anything could be.

Another woman! A young woman! And sitting in the chair put aside as sacred to the will and use of Ursula, queen of the valley! Ursula was astounded—more, she was angry; that any one should dare use her throne (though it was only an ill-made chair) was beyond her belief.

The young women engaged in a war of

glances. Ursula forgot her anger in her surprise and curiosity. Whatever wind of fortune had blown the other girl there, there she was; and Ursula gazed at her with attention which only one of her retired mountain life could feel.

She marked the rarely-formed, symmetrical features of the stranger; the fresh, full-colored face which had not a trace of sunburn upon it; the large, handsome eyes; the abundant hair so elaborately arranged; the twin diamonds in the small ears, and the sparkling stone on one finger of the white hand; the well-rounded form; and the garments which, though not rich, had cost more than any five suits Ursula had ever had—all this, and more, Ursula saw. She was a woman; she was in a hostile mood. Having said that, it need scarcely be added that she saw all in that brief, keen, unsparing glance.

The other girl seemed startled, but Ursula was not.

Her lips curled contemptuously.

"Were you made to order?" she asked, with a sneer.

"I don't understand," was the hesitating reply.

"I presume not. Who are you?"

"My name is Leonice Ross."

"Humph!" disdainfully commented Jeffreys's daughter.

"Are you a prisoner here?" asked Leonice.

"No. Are you?"

"Yes."

"No more of the kind scattered around loose, is there?" asked Miss Jeffreys, grimly.

"There are two more prisoners."

"You don't say so!"

"Unfortunately it is true."

"Are you here for ransom?"

"I don't know."

"What particular person is your captor?"

"Garrett Jeffreys."

"Whew! Is that so? You are his prisoner, and put in this room! I think I see—I think I do; but of all the fools—Garrett Jeffreys's prisoner! Hum!"

There was a singular mixture of grim humor, anger and vindictiveness in the mountain-girl's manner. She looked upon Leonice's presence with suspicion; she looked upon Leonice's beauty with envy and hostility. She saw danger in the air, in the camp, in Leonice—everywhere. And the suspicion that was in her mind was only less an incentive to hatred than the prisoner's good looks.

Her strange regard troubled and frightened Leonice.

"Are you Jeffreys's daughter?" the prisoner asked.

"I am. Do you want to be my mother-in-law?"

"What?" cried Leonice.

"Do you want to be my mother-in-law?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"You don't, eh? Then we are both of one mind; I don't want you should. Do you see that do?"

"Yes."

"The door has an important connection with some advice I am about to give you. Some folks make many words, but I don't believe in it. I'll put my advice in just one syllable—skip!"

As she spoke Ursula pointed toward the door, but, a moment later, a heavy step sounded and Jeffreys, himself, appeared from the inner room.

"I've got somethin' ter say about that," he grimly observed.

"And I have something to say to you!" retorted Ursula.

"I'll give you a chance ter say it later."

"I'll say it now and give thanks to nobody. Garrett Jeffreys, have you gone clean crazy?"

"Come, now, Ursula, that's a good gal!—don't say anything now. We'll talk bime-by."

The wrecker was uneasy, and he tried to quell the storm by winking to his daughter, but she proved obdurate.

"I'm bound to speak my mind before the wedding," she coolly declared. "I didn't have a voice in the choice of my mother, but I'm going to make up when it comes to a step-mother. My judgment is better—"

"Now hold right on, Ursula, fur you are makin' a big mistake," began Jeffreys; but he was interrupted.

"Don't talk nonsense, captain!" advised the captain's daughter. "You can't deceive me; you didn't bring a—well, an apology for a pretty young woman, here, and install her in that sacred chair for nothing. You mean matrimony, and—great heavens! What a fool you are! Now, Garrett Jeffreys, I want one thing understood right away. The Jeffreys family is already big enough, and I won't have any more. You may be in your second childhood, but I ain't. Mark one thing down—you can't marry that girl!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CAPTIVES.

JEFFREYS was accustomed to his daughter's vixenish moods, and what astonished Leonice only vexed and angered him. He could have raised his hand against Ursula with hearty good-will, but what would have compelled obedience from any other person in the band would

have fallen as ineffectually as a feather upon the imperious girl's understanding.

For years he had been able to control her in only one way.

"Come, come, Ursula," he argued, in his most persuasive way; "you are wholly wrong. Great Scott! what do I want o' a gal not half my age—"

"You want to marry her!" retorted Ursula.

"Nonsense!"

"What a stupid person you are!" remarked the dutiful daughter, calmly.

"I can explain the whole business," protested Jeffreys, "an' I'll do it ef you give me a show; but do keep your tongue still for now. I'm home with three prisoners who will bring me in a heap o' money, an' I want ter take care of them, an' fix up quarters for them right away."

"Who are the other prisoners?"

"Another woman an' a man."

"How old a man?"

"About twenty-five or thirty."

"Good-looking?"

"He's a right smart-lookin' feller!" asserted Jeffreys, with sudden eagerness. "He's in with Vaughan; go an' see him, Ursula."

The girl laughed shortly.

"Bless me, how simple you are, Cap! To keep me from touching your cosset lamb you throw me a young man as bait. Cap, this wolf is no fool, but I will go and see the 'right smart-lookin' young man, and fight it out with you about Laura Matilda later. If I like the young man, possibly I will let you marry your jeweled doll on condition you leave the region with her, and turn over the band to me and the right smart young man. We'll study on that point, Cap, and settle it anon."

She waved her hand and coolly left the room.

Without the least hesitation she walked toward the other large building. Her object was to see the new male prisoner. For years her own will had been her only law, and she had no hesitation in gratifying it now, but it must not be supposed that she was actuated by great curiosity. If the creature she proposed to view had been a newly-acquired horse she would have felt more interest—simply because she admired a horse more than she did men.

The building last referred to was the prison. It consisted of three rooms, two of which were so strong that they were called "dungeons," while the third was larger and more open. Ursula expected to find the prisoners there and she did.

An outlaw guard was on duty, rifle in hand, and the prisoners sat talking at one side of the room. They were Hubert Vaughan and Paul Ballard.

At one end of the room was a window in which was neither glass nor sash. Ursula walked to it from the outside, leaned her arms upon the lower part, dropped her pretty chin upon her hands and proceeded to survey the new-comer critically.

Both he and Vaughan looked up, and she had as good a view as she could desire.

"Jeffreys's daughter," explained Hubert, in a low voice, but not low enough to baffle her acute hearing.

"Who asked you to introduce me?" retorted Ursula.

"I think no harm is done," pleasantly replied Vaughan.

"Does it pain you to think?"

Vaughan concluded not to venture a reply.

"I say, stranger," Ursula continued, "you're in bad company. You don't know that fellow as I do."

She nodded scornfully toward Vaughan.

"We are previous acquaintances," explained Ballard.

"That so? When did he escape?"

"Escape?"

"Yes; from State's Prison."

"Our young lady is pleased to be sarcastic," remarked Vaughan, "but she has a good heart."

"Too good for you to catch!" Ursula quickly replied. "See here, stranger, if he's your friend I haven't a word to say, not even against him. You rather please my eye. If all men was like you there would be fewer monkeys. I never obeyed a man yet, but perhaps if I was your wife I should do just as you said. I'd make a good fight first, though."

"Surely we should not fight," remonstrated Ballard, with more amusement than he had expected to find in the wreckers' camp.

"We should, unless you were willing to knuckle under, first thing, but, as I said before, you might get the best of it. You're good-looking, and you've got vim—plenty of fire about you, and that's what I like. Have some fire in my own nature. I say, though, what's your name?"

Paul decided to try an experiment. He was little known by his real name, and widely known by his sobriquet. As every wrecker in camp knew who he was, it would do no harm to tell Ursula.

"I am Central Pacific Paul," he quietly replied.

The girl started a little, and then made a skeptical gesture.

"Get out!" she briefly commented.

"He's a-tellin' ye the truth, miss," observed

the wrecker guard. "He's the blamed detective who's done so much mischief along these regions, but Garrett Jeffreys has got him in quod, an' he's a gone goose, I reckon."

"Upon—my—word!" quoth Ursula, looking hard at Paul, "here's an adventure. You, Central Pacific Paul! You, the flash-o'-lightning detective!"

Surprise was expressed in every feature, and then her face suddenly flushed.

"Didn't I say you had vim? Didn't I say you had plenty of fire? I'm no fool, if I do live in the mountains. I know a good man when I see him, and I see him now."

The last words were slowly uttered, and she looked at Ballard harder than ever. It would have been a blind man who could not have seen that thoughts of no small moment were stirring in her mind, but she suddenly aroused, laughed in her airy, reckless way, and added:

"You'll be missed by your gang when you go under."

"I don't intend to go under for a good fifty years yet," calmly answered the detective.

"Nonsense! Garrett Jeffreys will wind up your career inside of a week. I suppose a bullet hurts when it strikes, but it ain't so bad as a rope."

Her remarks had run into a channel far from pleasant, and she did not tarry to make a more agreeable impression. Turning abruptly away, she left the prison and sauntered through the village of huts. At that point she met Duke Griffin, but only a cold nod passed between them. Ursula had a degree of education not to be expected of such a girl, reared as she had been in the mountains, and Griffin had been her teacher. Of late they had not agreed well, and the studies had been discontinued.

The lieutenant went on to the prison. Seeing Ballard and Vaughan in conversation, he first looked at them sharply, and then told the guard to put each in his "dungeon." The order was obeyed, and Duke followed Vaughan into one of the rooms. It was a dozen feet square, had only one door, and the only thing in the way of a window was a small opening in the wall far above a man's reach, through which fresh air could come.

Griffin had not condescended to explain anything thus far, but he now pointed to one of the two stools and occupied the other himself.

Vaughan waited quietly. Since he was taken away from the train as a prisoner he had not been subjected to any real brutality, but he realized that the wrecker lieutenant was his enemy, and a dangerous one.

"I suppose," said Griffin, deliberately, "that Ballard has told you that Margaret Roland is a prisoner here."

"Well?" briefly returned Vaughan.

"Such is the fact. Do you remember the old days when you worshiped the ground she walked upon?—so to speak?"

"Come to the point," Vaughan answered, endeavoring to conceal his anger and indignation.

"You aspired to be a lawyer; you sought permission to defend a client, when you found that no client would seek you. Let me see—did you win the case?"

Duke beat a tattoo upon his forehead, and feigned to make a strong effort to recall certain facts. He was stabbing his companion to the heart, metaphorically speaking, with each crafty sentence, and he knew it.

Live as long as he might, Hubert Vaughan would never outgrow the bitter memory of those days when he tried to raise the family name to a higher plane, and so disastrously failed.

"I think you lost the case," pursued Griffin. "Margaret told me, but I am not quite sure. Did you lose—or win?"

"Thanks to you, I lost," Vaughan answered, in a deep voice.

"Thanks to me?"

"Yes, because you betrayed my case to the opposition."

"Ah! I remember now. Yes, yes; you are quite right; somebody did betray your secrets to the other lawyers, and you were long at a loss to know who did it. You confided only in Margaret, and talked with her only in your private office. I recollect all now. I came to your town and found you and Margaret engaged in a charming flirtation, such as she only could carry on. Am I quite right?"

"You ought to know."

"I thought likely that you knew something about it. However, it don't matter. Well, after the lapse of years, here we all three are again, strangely met. Quite a change from the civilized town where first our lives run into the same channel. Gone is the prim old town, and Garrett Jeffreys and his gay lads hang like a dark cloud over the scene. A terrible fellow is Garrett! Why, he thinks no more of cutting a human life-boat loose from its anchorage on the earthly shore than I do of winging a grizzly! So runs the world away. But Margaret—did I speak of Margaret?"

"Proceed!" coolly directed Vaughan.

"I will. Margaret and I are to marry."

Griffin assumed a careless air, but watched the prisoner sharply to see the effect of his shot.

He was disappointed; Vaughan did not exhibit the least emotion.

"I thought I would drop in and let you know of the grand event," added the lieutenant. "Everybody is invited, and you will be one of the spectators. Perhaps you would like to give the bride away, being an old friend? No? Well, at any rate, you can lend your presence to brighten the occasion. No more at present, for I must go. Farewell, friend Hubert!"

The wrecker smiled, nodded, waved his hand and went out. Cool as Vaughan had been, Duke felt sure he was suffering mentally.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SENTENCE.

It was one day later, and Ballard and Vaughan were together in the larger room of the prison. During the night they had been separated and each locked in a "dungeon," a place, by the way, from which escape was impossible with the means at their disposal; but when morning dawned again they were returned to the large room and a guard again set over them.

Central Pacific Paul noticed that this guard always seemed interested in their conversation, and he suspected that there was some well-considered motive for allowing them to be together.

The afternoon had come, and Jake Blade was on duty. He was inclined to be jovial and sociable. He reminded them that he had been on the train with them in the storm-trap, and wanted to talk over the events of that period. He was not disappointed; they could not afford to antagonize any one who showed the least degree of civility, and Blade was humored in his desires.

He had been on duty an hour when there was a stir in the wrecker village, and Jake, looking outside, observed that "somethin' was goin' on."

"Looks like new arrivals," he added.

"More prisoners, perhaps," answered Paul, without much interest.

"Blamed ef I don't think you're right. The boyees do seem ter hev somebody in their grip—quite a number o' somebods. One, two, three. Three prisoners, an' all men. Business is gettin' brisk, an' we'll hev a reg'lar colony hyar. We'll rival Leadville in size, yit. Hullo!"

The last exclamation was one of surprise, and then he turned toward his charges again.

"Say, they're old frien's o' yourn."

"Who is it?"

"Three o' the passengers on the train. One is named Whiting, while the others' names I forgot."

"Is one Arlington?"

"That's it. Yes, it's them, sure as you're alive. Wonder whar the boyees dropped on them? It's queer!"

Ballard regarded it as "queer." He could imagine Whiting and Arlington following their trail and being captured by Jeffreys's men, but the persons in question had been started off on the train, and the first station was so far away from their starting-point that he could not understand how they had returned so soon.

"They look rusty," observed Blade.

There was no time to explain this vague statement; Jake straightened up and began to pace his beat with dignity as a procession which was composed of the new prisoners and their guards drew near.

They reached the door. There were Whiting and Arlington, looking weary, angry and dilapidated, and beside them was a man with a most downcast, solemn face. There was no doubt as to his identity—it was the renowned genealogical investigator, Van Tromp Stuyvesant Bliss.

The trio were hustled into the prison, and then Jeffreys, following, looked at the various parties and laughed aloud.

"I say, why don't ye rush inter each other's arms?" he demanded. "You're old friends—what d'ye want ter be so cold an' offish for?"

Nobody answered. Ballard and Vaughan were looking at Whiting and Arlington with cold disdain which was answered with hostile and angry stares.

"I'll let you take yer time to get acquainted ag'in," added the wrecker. "I'm gettin' in such a squad of prisoners that I'm thinkin' o' startin' some sort of Siberian mine experiment which shall put you all ter work an' bring me in some cash—all on you except one."

He turned his gaze upon Ballard with a sudden darkening of his face.

"One o' you," he resumed, "will hear from me ag'in afore night. I have somethin' special for him!"

Central Pacific Paul did not fail to notice the covert intimation, but even Jeffreys's glance did not alarm him. He expected no mercy at the hands of the wreckers; he had from the first expected them to do their worst; and it was not at all strange, hating all officers of law as they did, that they should single him out for an object upon which to visit their enmity.

The wrecker turned abruptly to his men.

"We can't leave all this gang free," he observed. "Thar are too many ter make that safe. Tie the hands of every man—Benjamin of them!"

This order was carried out. It would have

been folly to resist in any case, for the eight wreckers present were fully armed, and, as it was, the house was divided against itself in regard to the prisoners. They were soon reduced to a helpless state.

"I'll leave you now like a happy fam'ly," said Jeffreys, with an air of satisfaction. "I don't know of anybody that could enjoy themselves more than you can ef you see fit. Thar's a good deal in common between you. Dan Hopper, you may stay with Jake as a guard, an' ef one o' them makes a bolt for freedom, wing him without mercy."

The wreckers filed out until only Blade and Hopper were left. They held their rifles ready for use and looked at the prisoners.

The two parties were not inclined to fraternize. Whiting and Arlington drew to one end of the room and looked at Ballard and Vaughan in a surly, hostile way. Bliss seemed uncertain which party to mix with, but finally moved over to the side of the detective.

"I say, we're in a terrible fix, aren't we?" he asked, nervously.

"It is not pleasant," Paul admitted.

"Does—a—does that Jeffreys butcher men, outright?"

"Sometimes."

"Good Lord! I'm a goner!" ejaculated Mr. Bliss. "I wish I had never come to this heathen country!"

"Good chance to look up pedigrees here. Jeffreys, Blade, Hopper and the rest all had ancestors."

"Don't speak of it; I want nothing to do with the brutes. I suppose we shall all be butchered, and what worries me most is that my cousin, Percival Alonzo Bliss, who keeps our family record, may never get the date of my death. I can die with becoming dignity, I hope, but to have any uncertainty as to my record on the book—that is more than I feel able to bear!"

"I hope there will be no occasion to write your obituary for many years to come," gravely responded Paul, "but let us not dwell upon the mournful subject. I would like to know how you fell into the power of the wreckers."

"It all came of my disposition to oblige, and I'll never help another man," asserted Bliss. "Whiting and Arlington came to the hotel yesterday and wanted to see you. I told them you had gone away. They asked where. I answered that you did not confide in me; and that I did not even know of your departure until you were gone; but that I had heard you went north along the Hangman's Run road."

"Why did you tell them all this?"

"They said they had business yith you."

"Go on!"

Ballard was not pleased, but as Bliss had not been confided in by any one, he was probably not to be blamed. Not knowing how serious had been the trouble with the judge, he had acted without any idea of doing damage.

"They asked me to go with them, and we took the same road you did. Arlington claimed to be something of a trailer, and when we were in the wooded hills he said the trail left the road—"

"Did you see any carriage there?"

"No."

"Proceed."

"Well, we took to the woods and followed what Arlington declared was your trail, and we run plump into the train-wreckers, who brought us here."

"How did Whiting and his friend get back to the hotel? They went off on the train."

"I saw a bruise on Whiting's face, and when I asked the cause of it, he said he and Arlington had jumped off the train. I did not believe it at first, but they said it was when the train was going around a curve slowly."

"Have you seen Yank Yellowbird?"

"Not since I saw you. He left the hotel the next morning before I was up."

"Then you did not see him on the Hangman's Run road?"

"No."

Ballard was silent. He could not understand what had become of the mountaineer. After the capture of Paul's party by Jeffreys the carriage had been left in the road, and the driver bound to a tree. The detective had laid his hopes on the probability that Yank would discover the situation and make some move toward rescue, but Yank seemed to have disappeared mysteriously.

Conversation languished in the prison room. The antipathy of the two parties of captives prevented either from talking as they would have done under other circumstances. Bliss, alone, was in a conversational mood, and his only object was to keep his mind from dwelling upon painful subjects.

Jake Blade and Dan Hopper saw his mood and did what they could to divert his mind. They bantered him unmercifully, ridiculing his figure and his dress, the cut of his hair and the weakness of his straw-colored mustache; and then they playfully disputed as to the size in circumference of the rope which would be needed in case the band concluded he "was not worth wintering," as Hopper expressed it with fine humor. Anon they told stories of desperate fights in the wild mountain passes; of the

sacking of wrecked trains; of the summary way in which the band disposed of obnoxious prisoners; of forays to peaceful towns, and the fate of the inhabitants at their hands; but talk of what they would, they always returned to the subject of poor Bliss's neck and the rope.

It was idle talk, but they had an object and accomplished it—they frightened Bliss almost out of his wits.

Anon, another outlaw sauntered into the prison.

"Which is Central Pacific Paul?" he asked, carelessly.

"Him," replied Jake Blade, pointing.

"I've got a letter fur him. I observe his hands are tied, so I'll fix it fur him."

The outlaw spread a sheet of brown paper out on the floor and retired. Ballard looked down and saw the bold writing he had learned to recognize as Griffin's, and this was what he read:

"C. P. PAUL, Esq.:—

"The Court has sat on your case and a decision has been reached. We find you a man detrimental to the growth, freedom and glory of the Western country, so we decide that you had better skip off the stage. Traveling is bad around here, owing to the roughness of the hills, and horse-flesh is valuable, so we will start you on your retreat by the air-line. You will find it superior to any other when you get accustomed to it."

"The sentence of the Court is that you be taken from your dungeon cell to-morrow morning, at sunrise, and be disposed of *a la Judge Lynch*."

"If you imagine there is any idle joke about this, we will find a way of convincing you when the sun rises again. The fact is, such men as you are not wanted in the West; you belong to a class of sneaks I don't like, and I will admit you are the worst of the lot. We have you in our power, at last, and you die at sunrise."

"I select this hour so that you may have a good night's rest. Pray improve it, and be ready at the appointed hour."

GARRETT JEFFREYS."

Several pairs of eyes watched the detective as he read, but not one discovered anything of the nature of the letter. It brought no surprise to Ballard, and his face was under too good control to betray emotion.

There had been no necessity of assuring him that the threat was not a jest. He knew how Jeffreys and his men regarded him, and had expected something of the kind from the first.

Quietly he pushed the letter toward Vaughan with his foot, and that individual read it with more emotion than Ballard had shown. He looked up and met the detective's gaze.

"A pleasant communication," observed Paul, dryly.

"Do you really think they mean it?" asked Vaughan, in a troubled way.

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"Then—"

"Sunrise will be a dangerous hour for me!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

URSULA'S COMPACT.

THE day was drawing to a close, and dusky shadows were gathering in the gulches. Only the elevated ridges were touched by the rays of the fast-sinking sun.

Ursula Jeffreys emerged from a narrow gulch, ascended a wooded hillside, and sat down in an open space at the foot of a tree. Her manner was unusually thoughtful for her, and far from happy. She continued in meditation after sitting down, and with many a pretty frown and nod proceeded to weigh in her mind some subject which seemed of considerable interest.

The quick flight of a bird disturbed her ordinarily good nerves; she started and looked up abruptly. She saw—not the bird, but a man.

A man not twenty feet away, but perfectly still, and leaning upon a singularly long rifle, regarding her attentively. Ursula was not frightened. Far from it. It was not her nature to be frightened, and in the present case a glance was enough to assure her that no danger was near. The man was quaint and queer, if her judgment was correct. He was tall, bony and homely; his coarse garments hung loosely upon his muscular frame; he wore a fur cap through which projected a wisp of his flaxen hair; he was about fifty years old, but age sat lightly upon him. He looked to be a veteran mountaineer, and his expression was mild and pleasant.

"Don't holler, little gal!" he pacifically requested.

"I don't intend to," calmly answered Ursula.

"Glad on't, by hurley! I like courage."

"I don't see anything to be afraid of."

"No; nor I."

The tall mountaineer stroked his beard benevolently.

"Perhaps there are some things you don't see!" retorted Ursula, quickly.

"Jes' so—to be sure. What, fur instance?"

"Bears, men and other things."

"I've met 'em all afore, in good will an' bad will, an' I've come out on't with a good 'eal o' muskle left. Barrin' an egregious tech o' the newrolgy, I'm as good conditioned as I was twenty year ago."

"What are you doing here?"

"Huntin'."

"Suppose you were to meet other hunters—men who were after human game?"

"Jeffreys's men, fur instance?" quietly asked the tall mountaineer.

"I see you're no fool."

"I'm glad ter hear ye say it. Of all the on-comfor'ble critters I ever saw a fool is the worst—not that they're ter blame—land o' Gosben! no—but they ain't useful, an' I've knowed them that wa'n't ornamental."

"You are a philosopher, I see."

"I inherit it from a man my aunt's cousin married. By the way, speakin' o' fam'ly ties, I've heerd that Garrett Jeffreys has a darter."

"Don't try to be so deep, trapper. I am Ursula Jeffreys and you know it. What next?"

Ursula was not so saucy as usual. She found her new acquaintance a novelty, quaint alike in looks and speech, and he had thus far done nothing to provoke her sharp tongue or her anger.

"How's everything in the village?"

"What village?"

"Down there a few rods, whar the train-wreckers live?"

"It's plain to me," answered Ursula, "that you are a man out of the ordinary run. Are you Jeffreys's friend?"

"No."

"Then you are a man to be feared: you know too much to be a safe traveler of these hills; you are dangerous."

"More dangerous than Jeffreys?"

"To some, yes."

"As I was passin' along the lower ridge thar, a bit ago, I seen two men comin'. I stepped ter kiver, an' they did not see me, but as they passed they did some talkin' that int'rested me. I heerd it said that Jeffreys would bang Central Pacific Paul at sunrise, ter-morrer."

"You know too much—by far too much!" declared Ursula, regarding the mountaineer with a frown.

"I wish I knowed more."

"I dare say you do."

"I wish," said the mountaineer, stretching out his hand toward the wrecker village, "that I knowed what person thar has a heart open ter human feelin'."

"There is not one."

"How many did ye say?"

"Not one."

Ursula spoke firmly, but the tall stranger looked at her earnestly, and, leaning heavily upon his rifle, added:

"Thar is no better ingredients in the human heart than marcy an' charity, an' them are traits that grow nat'rally in female bosoms. They need good, true hearts ter nourish 'em, charity an' mercy do; an' that's why we see 'em so often in women-folks. I've stood up in battle with men as brave as hurley, an' when we's strikin' our hefty blows I felt proud o' my partner, but what's noble, an' gentle, an' marcfiful, springs up more nat'ral with the female-kind."

"Not around Garrett Jeffreys's quarters," brusquely replied the girl.

"That don't a'ply ter his da'rter, I'll bet."

"Wrong! It does apply."

"Come, come, I can't b'lieve it. We all hev our leetle weaknesses, but you ain't got the face o' a hard-hearted person—you ain't, by hurley!"

"Wait!" directed Ursula. "You've been puzzling me; I've tried to make up my mind who you were, and I couldn't; but I know now."

"That a fact?"

"Yes. You are Yank Yellowbird!"

The girl arose suddenly and approached the mountaineer. Interest and curiosity were expressed in every look, and Nevermiss knew he could do no better than confess.

"That's my name," he quietly admitted.

"The greatest of bordermen."

"Land o' Gosben! no—who put that idee inter yer head? I'm only a simple old hunter an' trapper, an' I've got the newrolgy so mortally I couldn't be a hero if I tried."

"Your reputation is known to me."

Yank saw that his "reputation" was his best friend just then, and he attacked it no further.

"One thing I hope I do get credit for among my feller-men, an' that is, willin'ness ter, help them who are in distress. Now thar is them pris'ners down in the village. I want ter help them. I want your help. What do you say?"

He stood erect, and spoke in a steady, decisive voice. His mild face grew firm, and his eyes beamed stronger than before. His mood was wholly changed.

"You forget who I am," said Ursula, in a very low voice.

"Not a tall; I forget nothin'; but I rely on the human feelin' you must hev fur them. Have you seen Central Pacific Paul?"

"Yes."

"Ain't he worth savin'?"

"Yes."

"Then thar is the females—"

"I don't care a fig for her!" exclaimed Ursula, irrelevantly. "I wish I had never seen her. I don't like her; I hate her. I wish you would take her out of the way."

"I wish I could, by hurley!"

"Central Pacific Paul is different; I like him. He's the finest man I ever saw."

"Too fine ter hang, I think."

"Don't speak of it!" said Ursula, shivering.

"Talk won't help him out, I consait, but work

will. Little woman, he's in a most egregious fix, an' it depends upon you an' me ter help him out."

"You forget that I am Garrett Jeffreys's daughter."

"Not much, I don't; but I likewise remember that you are a woman, an' a mortal pooty one. Pooty women are always kind-hearted—never knowed the rule ter fail in all my experience. My cousin who writ poetry was that way, an' her verses would wring tears from a flint rock. She writ a poem once ter a widower whose wife was dead, an' it 'fected him so he never was good fur nothin' arterward. This ain't ter the p'int, though. How shall we help Paul away?"

The mountaineer paused and looked at Ursula with considerable anxiety, to see if he had made an impression.

He had done this, but all was not due to his appeals to her instinct of mercy. Mercy—and a warmer feeling—impelled her to help Ballard, but there was something else which tempted her to do what she had never done in the past—betray her father.

Leonice was still in the house, and the dislike Ursula had first taken to her had grown to positive hatred. If Leonice had been twenty years older Ursula would probably have accepted the inevitable after a struggle, but she was unreasonably jealous of the captive's youth and beauty.

Perhaps it would not have been so bad had she not quickly divined her father's intention to make Leonice his wife—or perhaps it would. Be that as it may, she now hated the other girl.

"I'll help you on one condition," she replied, after brief hesitation.

"What is that?"

"That you will take away another person who is there."

"Who is that?"

"That girl! Her name is Leonice Somebody-or-other—I don't know who—and I hate her!"

The impetuous speaker brought her foot viciously down upon the ground.

"I'll help you if you'll take her away, too," she added.

"Perhaps I'll do it," quoth Nevermiss, stroking his beard with a thoughtful air. "One good turn deserves another, I consait. Yes; ter please you I'll take this Leonice away, too. Kin you arrange it?"

"I will, somehow."

"Got any plan?"

"Not yet, but I will form one."

"I'd rather have it settled now. How many guards do they put over the prisoners?"

"There has been only one, but there are now more prisoners, and there will be more guards."

"More than two?"

"Perhaps not."

"I consait I kin manage them, so all I'll ask o' you is that you'll meet me 'bout ten o'clock at a given point, an' tell me jest how the case stands at camp."

Yank looked at her closely as he spoke. Was he wise to trust her as he was doing? That was what only time could tell, but he had his opinion, and he intended to rely upon it—and upon her. He hoped all would be well, but it was a fact that she would have an excellent chance to betray him to his enemies.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE TRAIN-WRECKER'S PLAN.

YANK could discover no sign of guile in Ursula's face. She met his gaze frankly and easily, and replied:

"I'll do what you think best. I can meet you at the round-topped rock by the side of the valley—perhaps you noticed it?"

"I did."

"Well, I'll meet you there, as you ask. Before I come I'll know just how everything is situated, and what your chances will be."

"That's all right, little woman, an' I'm deeply obleeged ter you, but I ain't selfish enough ter close my eyes ter one p'int. S'pose Garrett Jeffreys finds out the part you took in the affair? What'll he say ter you?"

"I don't care what he says."

"B'ar in mind he's yer father."

"Bear in mind that he's a bad father!" she retorted.

"I allow he is, an' that's what makes it so bad fur you. Will he do you harm?"

"He hadn't dare!" Ursula cried; "he knows better than to lay a hand upon me. Now, don't you look so shocked; you don't know him as I do. I've heard that in the settlements children are supposed to 'honor and obey' their parents. Does that rule hold good when a parent is an outlaw and a murderer, and brings up his daughter in such a life? I think not. I don't owe Garrett Jeffreys anything, and my conscience won't trouble me if I go against him."

"Your arguments are strong on that p'int, but I ain't so sure o' your personal safety. I'm afeard he'll do ye harm—I be, by hurley!"

The mountaineer spoke earnestly; and his gray eyes beamed kindly upon her.

"He hadn't dare!" Ursula asserted.

"Listen ter me, little woman! I see in you the makin' o' a fine woman, an' my heart somehow goes out ter you. Let the result o' this difficulty be what it may, I hate egregiously ter

see you left among these scalawags. Why need you stay with 'em? Why can't you leave an' go whar folks is honest?"

"Would honest folks take to Garrett Jeffreys's girl?" asked Ursula, bitterly. "Wouldn't they scorn me, and mock at me? Wouldn't it always be thrown in my face?"

"Land o' Goshen! no—not that they're too good for it; fur I've noticed that the higher up in the world folks git, the less o' charity they have—but what folks don't know they can't set in jedgment on. Nobody need know who you was. Take a new name, an' begin 'new wholly. I'll help ye. I'm a plain old mountain man, but I've got a few stray dollars laid by, an' I'll be glad ter help ye. Come! you are too pooty an' good-hearted ter lead this life. Leave it; leave the train-wreckers; leave what is criminal an' rough, an' start fresh. The air hyar is bad—go away!"

Yank spoke with increasing earnestness. For the time being he had forgotten everything but Ursula. He was sincere in all that he said, and truly desirous of helping her, and the kind, sympathetic light of his honest eyes conveyed the fact to the girl.

She realized all that he tried to express, and an agitation which was new to her became perceptible in her expression and manner.

Never before had any one taken an unselfish interest in her; never before had any one advised her with no object in view but her own good.

She was too much moved to speak at once, but her natural mental shrewdness was not impaired—her first coherent thought was one of caution.

"I'll see—I'll see!" she replied, hurriedly. "You are very kind, and I won't forget it. I'll meet you by the round-topped rock at ten o'clock. Look for me there!"

She turned and walked abruptly away. Yank would gladly have said more, but he felt that it would not be best; he had made a strong impression, and persistence might destroy it. Better let Ursula go and wait patiently.

He watched her out of sight gravely, and then, withdrawing his gaze, saw Moses standing grimly beside him. The humorous side of the mountaineer came to the front at once.

"Wal, dog, what d'ye think on her?" he asked. "Ever see anybody much pootier, or cleaner-built? Your tail vibrates, an' I know you agree with me. Moses, old dog, you ain't no fool; you hev an eye fur female beauty, as wal as me. It runs in the Yellowbird blood. We take it from Adam, who was said ter be a gay an' festive chap, an' he made Eve a mortal sight o' trouble by flirtin' with other gals."

Yank looked at Moses, and Moses looked at his master, and there was great good will between them. Moses was not a free-and-easy, flippant dog. He had great dignity, marked reserve, a temper of his own and strong teeth. He was exclusive in his friendship, and his grim dignity was usually known by the libelous term "surly," but to Yank and a few congenial spirits Moses was a hail-fellow-well-met. For his master's sake the dog would have dared any danger—his record proved it.

Darkness was falling, and Nevermiss sought a position where he could watch the village, and waited, with Moses by his side.

In the meanwhile Ursula had made her return without incident. It had not taken her long to recover outward composure, and her face was as usual when she entered the village, but Yank's words were not gone from her mind.

She walked toward the prison, and found the captives eating supper. Blade and Hopper had been relieved, but in their place were men just as loyal to Garrett Jeffreys. Ursula did not speak to any one, but Paul Ballard was subjected to a brief scrutiny, of which he was blissfully ignorant.

Passing on toward the house she saw her father and Duke Griffin standing by the door, but they were on the point of separating.

"Bring Whiting an' Arlington hyar right after supper," directed Jeffreys.

"All right, captain."

"Wait a bit. Perhaps there is a better way. We have too many blamed women around hyar. Take them ter your hut, Duke, an' I will go thar ter see them."

"That will be a better way."

"Take them out quietly, an' don't let that villainous detective suspect anything."

"All right."

Griffin walked away, while Ursula stood close to the wall of the house and refrained from the least motion. She did not want to be seen. The darkness favored her, and the lieutenant passed unsuspectingly. Jeffreys returned to the house.

"Now, then, what is up?" muttered the girl. Cap Jeffreys has got some scheme in mind, and there is money or revenge in it. Wants to see Whiting and Arlington in private, does he? That means some crooked work. Say, he's a fine one—my father is! He's dead against Ballard, and I'll bet he bites lumps of sugar with these two men he's to see in Duke's hut. Bah! they have faces like apes—begging the pardon of the apes. Wonder if the cap'n thinks he can take them men to his manly bosom in some plot

against Ballard? Looks like it, and I reckon I'll hear that interview."

Ursula paused and looked at the house with a frown. Her opinion of Leonice did not grow better, and the house was not a pleasant place to her.

She entered abruptly.

Leonice and Madam Pulaski sat in the kitchen. They were not bound, but there was a check to their free movements. Jeffreys's housekeeper, a masculine-like woman named Susan, was there, and even a man would have found it hard to run away when Susan was there.

She spoke to Ursula as the latter entered, but there was no reply. The girl felt no awe of Susan, and treated her in the fashion that she did every one else. And Susan submitted to it. There had been a mental contest between the two years before, but the servant had been signally worsted, and had given up the unequal battle.

Ursula had now come to get her supper. She was blessed with a good appetite, but it was affected by the presence of Leonice and Madam Pulaski. Nothing would have induced her to sit at the table with them; it was bad enough, in her opinion, to be obliged to be near them.

As a result, she divided her time between eating and casting contemptuous glances at them, and their previous opinion that Ursula was a worthy child of her father received fresh strength.

Having finished her supper, the wrecker's daughter left the house. She cared nothing for the darkness; she had taken care of herself in the past, and felt quite able to do so in the future.

She had expected to reach Griffin's hut before the appointed meeting took place, but as she approached she heard the sound of voices which told her she was too late.

She approached the window and saw her father, Griffin, Whiting and Arlington within. Jeffreys was speaking earnestly.

"It's no use of talkin'," he doggedly observed, "I'm in a position to make my own terms, an' they're goin' ter be to suit me. You're my prisoners, an' I have a chance ter do just as I see fit. I'm on the money racket, an' ef I can't make it one way, I will another. You needn't talk any more about what you propose, or don't propose. The question is: Will you play inter my hand, an' give me a good show, tharby gettin' a good show yourselves, or will you keep a stiff back an' force me ter be your enemy? On one hand is captivity, on the other, freedom awaits you."

"I don't see how you can ask me to give up the girl," remonstrated Whiting.

"Have I asked you ter do it?"

"You have asked for the secret regarding her."

"Just so, but I sha'n't ask ag'in. You have your chance now—take it, or leave it."

"You offer us freedom if we speak out?"

"I do."

"And promise to dispose of Ballard and Vaughan?"

"They shall die at sunrise."

Whiting glanced at Arlington.

"What shall we do?" he asked.

"Give up the game, and speak out!" advised Arlington, viciously.

"Very well, then," the judge continued, "you shall know all. Leonice's father was a richer man than was thought. He owned a mine in the West, cr enough of it t foot up a fat sum. Eccentric person that he was, he told no one but me. He wrote me a letter, saying that he wanted the fact kept secret until Leonice was married. He did not want her to be sought for her money, as would ordinarily be the case; hence, his course. He wanted me to take Leonice, and keep her ignorant of her wealth until I had found a good husband for her."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A CHANCE FOR LIBERTY.

JEFFREYS broke into a loud laugh.

"I see!" he cried. "You was left to find a husband for the gal, an' you took your own way o' doin' it. You were a leetle too old, yourself, so you brought in your pal, Arlington. You tickle my ribs an' I'll tickle your ribs. You an' he go halves on the money, eh? A fine little scheme!"

"Don't you approve of it?" the judge asked, uneasily.

"I do. Yes, by Judas! I do approve of it. A fine scheme—a fine scheme!"

The train-wrecker pulled sharply at his beard, while his face assumed a speculative look.

"Leonice is a good ketch," he added, with a nod.

Whiting moved uneasily.

"So good a ketch," pursued Jeffreys, "that I thing she would make a good wife fur me!"

The judge flashed an angry glance at Arlington. He had feared this, and now that it had come to pass he wanted to vent his spite on some one. He dared not anger Jeffreys, but Arlington had advised the course which had proved so disastrous.

The wrecker rubbed his hands together and seemed to be in great good humor.

"I ain't too old ter marry, be I, jedger?" he asked.

"I think you are."

"Opinions differ."

"You may find it so with Leonice."

"Don't let that worry you. I got my eye on her on the train, an' she suited me to a dot. I'm bound ter have her anyway, though it'll be the old case o' Beauty an' the Beast over ag'in. Don't look sour, jedger; you ain't losin' any great haul. I should have a ransom anyhow, an' in this case I take Leonice. That's all—an' you shall go free in the mornin'. You can go right after I finish off Ballard an' Vaughan, or wait until my weddin'."

His complacent satisfaction was too much for Ursula. She had been listening with great disgust, and could bear it no longer. She turned and ran rapidly away.

If she had felt one remaining scruple against turning against her father, it would then have been gone.

During the last half hour she had had a vague idea in her mind that she might help Ballard and Vaughan. The idea grew stronger, and she walked to the prison and attentively surveyed the small opening before mentioned as a space for the admission of air. It was too small for any one to crawl through, and too high up for her to reach, but she had a plan.

She went a short distance away and returned with a spade and a rope. These she tied together, and then fastened her own knife to the rope.

One more journey away, and then she reappeared with a rude ladder.

She set the ladder against the wall just under the space for air, and then, seizing the rope, mounted quickly up the rungs. When she reached the top she drew the end of the rope which held the spade and knife.

With great care she pushed them through the opening into the "dungeon. Despite all her efforts she could not prevent the spade from rattling as it fell, but if the sound did not reach the ears of the wrecker guards, nothing would be lost by it. The attention of the prisoners would surely be attracted.

Letting out the rope steadily, she lowered the burden and then listened at the opening. She heard the sound of voices, but could not distinguish any words, and her attempt to gain a view of the prison-room was equally unsuccessful—she could see only the opposite wall.

Knowing that she was in danger of discovery if she remained in such a conspicuous place, she descended and carried her ladder to the place where she had found it. Then she retired to the prison and eagerly listened again.

She had supplied Ballard and Vaughan with means of escape if they could successfully use them. The spade was to dig their way out; the knife was to cut their bonds.

That they would succeed in doing the latter she did not doubt.

Listen as she would, she could hear nothing inside. This did not indicate inactivity on their part, for they must know that only great caution would prevent the guards in the larger room hearing them.

It was not in Ursula's nature to be nervous, but she was very eager. Would her plan succeed? There were more chances against than in favor of it. The wreckers were moving about, and they might at any moment enter the "dungeon." Discovery would probably destroy the last hope.

What was being done inside? Ursula pressed her face close to the wall and listened breathlessly. A wrecker walked past, but he did not notice her. The sound of Garrett Jeffreys's voice in the distance reminded her how furious he would be if he discovered the plot in the heart of his camp, but she did not waver or hesitate.

Hark!

At last a sound reached her ears, and it came from the prison-room. It was like the contact of a spade with a stone. Surely the captives were at work. Ursula listened for further manifestations, but none came. Whatever Ballard and Vaughan were doing, it was being carefully done.

She did not know the time, but as it must be drawing near the hour at which she was to meet Yank Yellowbird, she decided to enter the building, she called home, and look at the clock. She went, and found that forty-five minutes yet remained.

Once more she moved toward the prison.

Her first glance that way gave her a shock, for she saw her father's muscular figure just entering the door. She stopped short. His visit might mean nothing that threatened her plans, but the idea was strong in her mind that he intended to go to Central Pacific Paul's room.

Recovering her presence of mind somewhat, she hurried forward. Perhaps something could be done to avert the danger. What excuse she could make she did not know, but she relied upon the impulse of the moment.

She was too late.

When she reached the outer door she saw Jeffreys just opening the door of the "dungeon." It swung back, and the interior lay open to the captain's gaze.

He stopped short and looked in amazement,

and his surprise was not to be wondered at. The prisoners had been to all appearances left securely bound, but it was so no longer. Both were free, and Paul stood in a hole two feet deep, spade in hand, and evidently making rapid progress toward the outer world. A good-sized pile of earth had been thrown up, and as the hole he was digging was fast assuming the appearance of a tunnel, with the further end pointing under the wall, the purpose of the digging could not be doubted.

Jeffreys had come just in time to prevent an escape.

There was a brief pause, during which he gazed at the prisoners blankly, and they gazed at him in dismay, and then the captain recovered his presence of mind.

"Hullo!" he cried, "here's a fine upheaval. By Judas! I reckon I have come just in time. This way, guards, an' bring yer weapons ter bear on them!"

The order was quickly obeyed, and Ballard and Vaughan found themselves hopelessly under guard. They had no weapons that they could use, while the wreckers had only to touch the trigger and the drama would be over.

Ballard dropped his spade and stood passive. Jeffreys broke into a laugh.

"So you thought you'd get away, did ye?" he exclaimed. "Thought you'd fool me an' my human tigers, eh?"

"You can see for yourself," Paul replied, calmly.

"Rather!—the ear-marks do show. Ef I'd been a short time later you'd been under that wall, sure as preachin', but I have a word ter say, now; I don't want my village dug up like a garden. Come out here an' be tied up ag'in!"

Vaughan glanced at Paul. There was rebellion in his mind, and their downfall was bitter, but the detective had been in enough difficulties to take the inevitable coolly. It would be madness to attack the wreckers in the face of all those ready rifles, and he went quietly forward and submitted to be bound.

Both he and Vaughan were soon rendered helpless, and then Jeffreys was for the first time impressed with the fact that there was something mysterious about their late employment.

"Look hyar!" he exclaimed, "how'd you get that spade? How'd you get loose, anyhow?"

"Do you suppose your bonds could hold us?" replied Paul, contemptuously.

"Not ef thar was treachery at work. No spade was left in thar. How did you get it?"

"Purchased it at the corner-grocery," laconically returned the detective.

"So you won't answer?"

"Briefly, we will not."

"I am goin' ter find out."

"That is your affair."

"You bet yer life it is. I kin stand your attempt at a break—as long as it was no go—but treachery in my camp I won't stand. Somebody has betrayed me, an' I'll know who 'tis; an' when I do know, that person will wish he had never been born!"

The angry outlaw turned and found himself facing Ursula.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JEFFREYS'S FESTIVAL.

JEFFREYS would never be much nearer to the person he sought than he was then, but the presence of Ursula suggested nothing to him. Their late difficulties had seemed to him only a repetition of many that had gone before, and he did not suspect her of being the guilty person.

Instead, he subjected the guards to sharp questioning, but nothing was learned. They declared that no one had passed them; that no spade had been passed into the "dungeon;" and having said this, they told all that they knew.

"Wal, we'll let it rest for now," finally observed Jeffreys, "but I ain't through yet. I don't allow any double-dealin' in my camp."

Griffin and two other wreckers entered, and the captain waved his hand toward the prisoners.

"Freeze to them an' foller me!" he added.

The order was obeyed, and Ballard and Vaughan were marched from the building. Ursula was bitterly disappointed by the result of her scheme, as well as deeply concerned for the prisoners. Although sunrise was the hour appointed for their execution, there was something very suggestive about the latest movement.

She watched the men march out, and her face had lost all its brightness. She was tempted to run in search of Yank Yellowbird, but she did not know where to look for him at that time.

She experienced a feeling of great relief when she saw Jeffreys lead the way to his own house, but curiosity took the place of fear. What object had the captain in view? She determined to watch and solve the mystery.

Taking care not to be discovered she placed herself in a position favorable for listening and watching, but disappointment awaited her. No sooner was the party inside the house than the blankets which served as window-curtains were lowered and fastened in place by a few nails, the driving of which was plainly audible. This stopped her view, and added to the mystery of

the case. What did they intend to do there which required such secrecy?

Waiting with all the patience she could command, she listened further, standing close to one of the windows. It was not long before her curiosity received fresh strength. She could hear only a vague murmur as far as voices were concerned, but the blows of the hammer were followed by another, heavier kind of pounding.

Clank! clank! clank!

Heavily fell the strokes, and the peculiar ringing which accompanied them was that to be produced only by the contact of metal with metal.

At last this sound died away, too, and Ursula, wondering that the idea had not before occurred to her, drew a knife and cut a slit in the blanket, taking care to make it at a point where she thought it would not be observed.

She then had the desired view of the interior, and a strange scene was presented to her gaze.

Ballard and Vaughan, bound hand and foot, were in separate corners of the room, and something more than their own will seemed to keep them in an upright position. She sought for the cause and found it—two staples had been driven into the wall, and to each was bound a prisoner.

All this was very perplexing, and Ursula could in no way imagine why it was done. The door opened and all the wreckers passed out except Jeffreys, Griffin and Blade, and the door was barred securely behind them. Six persons then remained in the room; the wreckers, the prisoners and Susan.

Ursula came to a conclusion and acted upon it at once. The matter had grown too complicated for her to manage alone, and she determined to seek the place where she was to meet Yank Yellowbird. The clock showed that it lacked only twenty minutes of the appointed time, and she believed that the mountaineer would be there.

She hurried away toward the round-topped rock.

The scene did not grow less interesting after her departure. Jeffreys was in high spirits, and he swaggered around confidently.

"Stir yourself, Susan," he ordered, "an' get ready fur the feast. I want a spread that would do honor ter a duke. We ain't got so very much ter eat, nor no label o' the dishes; but I reckon we ain't very hungry, an' we can't feed on paper, nobow. Stir your stumps, Jake Blade, an' give Susan a lift!"

Blade stirred himself accordingly, and the table was soon set. There was a scarcity of food, certainly, but liquor was there in abundance, and the train-wrecker looked on with high approval.

"Now fur the next act," he added, when the work was done. "Keep your eyes open, Mister Detective, an' you'll see a good sight. Garrett Jeffreys entertains ter-night, an' he does nothin' by halves. Ef there is any man likes ter whoop 'er up, I'm that chap. Susan, escort the ladies out!"

Central Pacific Paul exchanged an uneasy glance with Vaughan. He had been confident that Leonice and Madam Pulaski were in the next room, and he regarded the situation of affairs as especially ominous.

Susan had left the room, but she was gone only a short time. She returned accompanied by Leonice and Margaret.

Both the latter paused abruptly as they saw the other prisoners, but Jeffreys did not let matters lag.

"Come to the feast!" he exclaimed, catching Leonice by the arm. "The repast awaits, an' the lords o' the realm are on deck. Set by; look yer prettiest; eat hearty an' give the house a good name; an' let the hours fly by at a gallop!"

Unheeding the girl's shrinking remonstrance he dragged her to the table, while Griffin offered his arm to Margaret with a cold and sneering assumption of politeness. The arm was refused, but Madam moved forward. She knew it would be folly to resist.

The four persons took their places, Jeffreys and Leonice on one side of the table, and Griffin and Margaret facing them. Susan and Blade stood near as waiters.

"The festival begins!" declared the captain, pointing his knife at Ballard. "Look on, ye slaves, an' see how gentlemen eat. You'll find it entertaining. Fall to, ladies, an' eat with a relish!"

Madam Pulaski gave Leonice a significant look which advised her to comply with the wrecker's whims as long as they were harmless. The so-called supper began, but it was only a farce, and Jeffreys did not expect any one to eat in earnest. He was, however, determined to annoy Ballard and Vaughan all he could. They had to look on and see the women in whom they were interested keep in the company of their rough captors in a scene intended to be a revelry.

Jeffreys, however, had overlooked one thing. All were free to use their eyes, and between Leonice and Paul, at least, glances were exchanged which spoke a good deal.

"Fill up yer glasses!" cried the captain, in boisterous good humor. "Drink the red wine to the dregs. What! You won't drink, Miss

Ross? Well, have it your way; there will be all the more for us. Duke, old man, can't ye tell us a story?"

"I'll try," the lieutenant replied, "though I'm not much of a story-teller."

"Bah! don't say that! Modesty always was your chief failin'. Go on, an' I'll bet somethin' you interest the whole gang. Take that bet, Vaughan?"

"No!" was the curt reply.

Jeffreys laughed aloud.

"It'll pay you ter foller the yarn," he declared.

"Go on, Duke, an' make it thrillin'."

"Only a plain story," returned Griffin; "the story of my wedded life."

"Ha! how's that? The romance begins at once. Go on!"

The captain swallowed another glass of liquor. He had swallowed several before the supper began, and was already feeling the effects of his indulgence.

"I married young," commenced Griffin, "as I would advise all men to do. It's the best way, by far. If men wait until they get old and world-wise, they also get cold and skeptical; but in youth they are innocent and unsuspecting, and the world goes merrily round."

"I married young; you shall see how it worked."

"Frankness is a jewel, and I like jewels, so I will be frank. My wife and I did not agree. I suppose I was too fond of seeing the world go merrily round; anyhow, I had boon companions, and when they got drunk I hadn't the heart to be opposed to their ways. I got drunk, too. Not once, alone, but at regular intervals."

"My wife objected. She was opposed to my drinking; she spoke right out against my gambling; she objected when I chastised her, as husbands sometimes feel it their duty to do."

"Gentlemen, my wife ran away from me!"

"Hear! hear!" cried Jeffreys.

"When she went," continued Griffin, and his levity suddenly gave place to sternness, "she took with her our only child. I won't dwell upon that, for I cared for the little girl in a way, and it makes me ugly to think how I was robbed of her. I have not seen her since."

He paused for a moment. If he had looked at Madam Pulaski, he would have found her gaze fixed upon Vaughan with painful intentness. Vaughan felt then that he knew her secret, and was prepared for what followed.

"It was two years later that I first saw my wife again," resumed the lieutenant. "I found her in an Eastern town, and appearances indicated that she had forgotten she was a married woman; anyhow, she was having a desperate flirtation with a young lawyer. She had injured me, and I planned to injure her. The young lawyer had a delicate case on hand, in which he confided only to his lady-love—my wife. Well, I bribed the janitor, concealed myself in a closet off the office, heard all of the lawyer's plans, and then went straight to the opposition lawyers and gave the whole thing away."

"I didn't wait to see the result, but met my wife and worked on her fears until she promised to leave the town with me. I told her I would seize the child if she did not go. The trial was over—and the case lost—when we got away, and the young lawyer nearly caught us at the depot when we took the train, but we escaped by a few seconds."

"Friends and enemies, I have only to tell the names of the other actors in that little drama. My wife calls herself, just now, Madam Pulaski, and the young lawyer—that was is now present. Behold him in Mr. Hubert Vaughan!"

The lieutenant ceased speaking, and there was silence in the room. There was one striking thing to be noticed by a close observer. Madam Pulaski was looking at Vaughan with her whole heart expressed in the gaze. She was trying to read his mind; to know what he thought of her then; and there was an appeal for merciful judgment in that gaze that was full of pitiful eloquence.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PARSON FROM TANGLEFOOT BAR.

It was the voice of Madam Pulaski which broke the silence.

"I want to add something to what has been told," she said, with desperate calmness. "I have been given a very unenviable reputation in the story just told. I will not now defend myself for having left the man whom bitter fortune made my husband; I wish only to refer to my later career. Mr. Griffin has said that I was engaged in a 'desperate flirtation' with the young lawyer of his narrative. I reply: I engaged in no flirtation. I had heard that my husband was dead, and believed that I was free to do as I saw fit."

"Despite this, I did commit a wrong. I was a widow with one child, and I never revealed the fact. This was both indiscreet and wrong; it was, perhaps, criminally wrong, for when the crash came I could not place myself right. Beset with my husband's threats that he would do harm to our child, I had no hope except in

flight. I did flee, but this man," she pointed to Griffin, "has only done me justice when he says that I had no hand in betraying the young lawyer to his professional opponents."

Jeffreys had been listening with impatience.

"Are you done?" he now demanded, irritably. "Get a woman ter talkin' an' there is no end of it. Don't anybody else try to explain. Madam Pulaski, you ought ter thank me fur doin' you a favor. Jedge Whiting forced you ter come West with his party, an' help hoodwink this little charmer"—here the captain leered at Leonice—"but I've clipped his wings. He won't injure your own child, Whiting won't; so put your mind at ease."

The speaker wheeled upon Central Pacific Paul.

"I say, old man, do you see where you come in?" he added, boisterously.

"You may tell me," Paul laconically responded.

"I'll show you. Jake Blade, trot out an' bring in the aristocratic guest we hev here."

Jeffreys laughed and Blade grinned, and it seemed that some great joke—for them—was in progress. Blade went out at once, and made his way to the rear of the prison. A man stood there, as though waiting for somebody.

"Are you thar, Dan Hopper?" asked Blade, lightly.

"I be, what's left on me," was the ungracious reply.

"Anything missin'?"

"Not as I know on, but ef I don't ketch the malignant newrology—that is, the roomatiz—I'll be lucky. Yas, I'm hyar, sure's my name is Dan Hopper. Lead on, Jake, an' let the tribulation begin."

"You're a good one, Dan!" declared Blade. "You've changed your voice, as wal as your looks—though I'd know ye right off. But them pris'ners won't."

"I consait not. With this rig on I look so like hurley—like the mischief, I mean—that I don't know myself. I'm so metamorphosed that my gran'father wouldn't know me."

Muttering thus the self-styled Dan Hopper followed Jake, and they were soon back at Jeffreys's house. Jake rapped, and Griffin promptly raised the bar. They entered.

It was a peculiar-looking figure which appeared at Blade's heels, and, truly, he looked very little like Dan Hopper. He wore a most prodigious beard and head of hair; they covered all of his head except the small, keen gray eyes, which gleamed in the midst of the forest of hair; and he might have passed as an old-time patriarch had his hirsute growth not been wild, ragged, erratic and uncombed.

One look was enough to convince any one that beard and hair were alike false—the work of art, not nature.

Add to this that the man's bony form was incased in a Prince Albert coat which was a world too small for him—the sleeves lacked a good deal of reaching his wrists, and it must have required great effort to button it around him—and it will be seen that there was some reason for the uproarious laughter with which Jeffreys greeted him.

The man, himself, stood looking around with an odd appearance of bashful curiosity.

Jeffreys recovered his composure.

"Ladies an' gents," he cried, "let me introduce ter you the Reverend Jason Stump, parson an' preacher."

Mr. Stump bowed very low.

"Peace an' prosperity abide with the faithful," quoth he.

"Hear the parson!" ejaculated Jeffreys.

"This is a happy scene, parson."

"To be sure."

"We've been havin' a feast, an' thar are some good things left. Now, preacher though you are, I'll bet something you ain't opposed ter wine-drinkin'. Will you have a nip?"

"Land o' Gosh—that is, verily, I am not given ter the use o' vile compounds fur pleasure, but when the blood o' weak man clogs, he should do somethin' ter set it a-flowin'. My blood is clogged now, an' I consait I will swaller a small decoction. Man is a weak sister—a weak vessel, I mean, an' prone ter trouble as sparks fly up'ards, and elsewhar. Jes' so, by gracious!"

And the Rev. Mr. Stump poured down a good-sized draught of wine.

Central Pacific Paul was watching in wonder.

Unless he was greatly mistaken this grotesquely-disguised man was Yank Yellowbird, and he was for a time perplexed, but it gradually dawned upon him that Jeffreys and his men were in some way deceived, and that they did not recognize the mountaineer. On the whole, this was not strange. The disguise, farce though it was, was perfect enough to hide all of the original Yank except his small, gray eyes, and he had assumed a new voice, but his most desperate efforts could not wholly keep back the peculiar expressions which were so characteristic of him.

The detective waited and watched with painful interest. Though wholly in the dark, he felt sure that Yank was working to help him. How would he succeed? The numbers of the train-wreckers were overwhelmingly against them,

but the sagacity of the tall mountaineer was proverbial.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Jeffreys; "it does me good ter see a parson drink. They take to it nat'ral as fishes ter water."

"Scoff not at my sacred cloth!" unctuously directed Mr. Stump, "but pour me another glass o' that benzine. 'Tain't so pow'ful as some, an' it needs a right smart heap ter git the clog out o' my blood."

"These parsons ain't fools," said the captain, addressing Griffin.

"Ef you think so, you're liable ter be took in like hurley—jest so; like hurly-burly. Good wine that; the clog is out o' my blood."

"Then let us git to business. Ladies an' gents, the Rev. Mr. Stump has come down from Tanglefoot Bar, a place he's tryin' ter reform—"

"An' git its name changed ter Sanctity City," put in the minister.

"Exactly. He's come down hyar to practice his trade a bit; in short, ter do some marryin'!"

The wrecker fixed his gaze upon Leonice, who grew as pale as marble.

"It is not good fur man ter be alone," quoth Stump, rolling his eyes upward.

"No; nor I ain't goin' ter be!" declared Jeffreys. "Fair Leonice, this night sees you my wife!"

"No, no!" cried the startled girl.

"Yes, yes!" persisted the wrecker. "What! are we ter have sech a lump o' sweetness as you circulatin' around loose? Not while Garrett Jeffreys lives, an' can appreciate bright eyes an' rosy cheeks."

"All flesh is grass!" dolorously deposed Mr. Stump, still looking at the ceiling.

"Some of it is mighty good grass."

"Life's but a barren waste," added the parson.

"I know a waist that will suit me," affirmed Jeffreys.

"Man wants only an egregious little hyar below, but he wants that little a long time an' a good 'eal on't," pursued Stump, growing more earnest, and rolling his eyes wildly.

"That'll do, parson."

"'Tis true, 'tis pity; 'tis pityfuler pity 'tis true pity, truly," mournfully enunciated Stump, raising both hands.

"Hold up!—hold up!" shouted Jeffreys. "I swar I can't stand no more of it, parson; you ain't here to preach a sermon, an' ef you was I'd hope it would be better than that rigmarole. Now, then, all hands around for the weddin'. Duke Griffin an' I both take a wife ter-night. Duke's wife is his already, but he will repeat the ceremony ter keep in practice. Madam Pulaski, prepare; you an' Duke are the second couple, an' you mustn't keep him waitin'. As fur me an' my rosebud-cherub, we will be made one at once!"

Moving quickly forward he grasped Leonice's arm. She uttered a cry and tried to escape him, but her strength availed nothing. He lifted her to her feet, chuckling with glee as he did so. Central Pacific Paul looked imploringly at Yank. What could he do with such odds against him?

Paul expected him to spring forward and liberate him and Vaughan—and then the three could do their best—but Nevermiss stood as composed as ever. His hands were clasped, and his eyes devoutly rolled upward.

"Hustle around!" continued Jeffreys. "Get yer partner, Duke, an' let the ceremony begin; the parson kin marry us both at once, wal's not. Observe how the thing is done, Mister Detective, an' thank me fur my kindness. You shuffle off the mortal coil at sunrise, an' I give ye this festival scene as a little recreation before ye go. How's that?"

Not a word did Ballard answer, but his eyes spoke for him. The train-wrecker laughed.

"Ef looks could kill thar wouldn't be much left o' me," he admitted. "I reckon, Ballard, that you envy me my rosy-cheeked prize. It may cheer ye up to know that Leonice an' I will be makin' love in a cottage while you are crossin' the river with Charon."

Jeffreys stopped short. He had been aware that Duke Griffin was having some trouble with Madam Pulaski, but he gave no particular heed until an exclamation from Jake Blade caused him to turn.

Griffin was at bay.

Madam Pulaski had risen and was facing the lieutenant with pale face but marble composure, and in her hand a revolver was held unwaveringly, its muzzle bearing upon Griffin.

"Fiends alive!" the lieutenant cried, "why wasn't that weapon taken away?"

"Take it now," advised Jeffreys.

"Yes, and get a bullet with it."

"Jake Blade, take that weepin'" the captain ordered.

"I don't hanker," replied Jake, shaking his head.

"Can't you two men master one woman?"

"Mebbe the parson will help," suggested Blade, grimacing at the disguised man.

A whistle sounded outside the building.

"That I will," agreed Mr. Stump. "Jest see me do it!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NOT ACCORDING TO THE PROGRAMME.

QUICKLY the so-called parson moved forward, and it looked as though he was about to attack Madam Pulaski, but what he really did surprised the train-wreckers.

As he was passing Griffin he suddenly threw out one hand and grasped that person by the collar, and then, with a quick movement, he stretched the lieutenant upon the floor. Another moment and the active spirit of the scene had thrown away the bar to the door and flung the latter open.

"Come in, ye hungry critter!" he cried, in a loud voice.

Griffin was struggling to his feet, but the attempt was a failure. The "parson" stretched him out again and planted one foot on his breast, while at the same moment a part of the disguise fell away and the honest face of Yank Yellowbird was revealed.

"Treachery!" shouted Jeffreys; "thar is treachery here!"

His hand fell to his pocket, but Nevermiss promptly turned a revolver upon him.

"Don't ye do it!" cautioned the mountaineer; "keep yer revolver where it is, or you'll get inter an egregious diffikilty!"

A dark, shaggy form darted into the room, and Moses took place beside his master, showing his teeth menacingly.

But he did not come alone. After him tramped men unknown to Jeffreys, but so plainly hostile to him that he knew the village was invaded. It was not in his fierce nature to surrender tamely, and he disobeyed the late order and drew his revolver with a quick movement. It was a rash course for him. One of the newcomers, who knew the mountain captain well by sight, was not disposed to give such a notorious person a chance. He fired quickly, and Jeffreys dropped his weapon and fell to the floor with a crash.

Just then the report of fire-arms was heard outside.

Yank gave Griffin in charge of a stout assistant and hurried forward to release Ballard and Vaughan.

"It's all right!" he declared, as he cut their bonds; "we've got a hip-lock on the atrocious insex. Some on 'em ain't gobbled yet, an' it stan's ter reason thar will be some fightin', but you needn't worry; I've posted them follerers o' mine up in the tick-tacks o' war, an' I consait they could cut their bigness in any enemy o' their size."

"Mountaineer," earnestly replied the detective, "I can never thank you—"

"Don't try. Go an' help Leonice, fur she looks sorter onstiddy on her feet."

There was more firing in the village.

Jake Blade had been looking around in dismay, yet with stout courage to keep him up. He now decided that his one hope lay in flight. He made a dash for the door. A revolver shot followed, but Blade kept on his way unharmed. The bullet, however, was not a harmless one—missing Blade, it found lodgment in Duke Griffin's side, and he fell back a desperately wounded man.

Jeffreys had been bound. He had a scalp-wound which had narrowly missed being a good deal worse, but it did not trouble him after the first confusion passed.

Ballard and Vaughan devoted a short time to reassuring Leonice and Margaret, and then the former addressed Yank.

"I am all in the dark, Nevermiss, as to how you have accomplished these worders—"

"Wait until ye see who leads these bold chaps."

"Who is it?"

"A feller-detective o' yourn, Windsor by name."

"Is it possible?"

"I consait so, fur it's a fact. When I dis-kivered how you'd been gobbled up I did it by findin' your wagon-driver tied to a tree on the road ter Hangman's Run. I remembered hearin' you say your friend Windsor was at Mount Despair, so I posted the driver off thar for help. I took the trail an' come hyar at once, but I wasn't much ahead o' Windsor an' his braves. They've only jest got hyar, but they come at a critikel period, I consait."

"But how came you disguised as Jeffreys's parson?"

"A good friend of ours"—here Yank whispered the name of Ursula Jeffreys—"told me Jeffreys had ordered Dan Hopper ter take part as a parson, fur a joke. Then I knowed jest what my Revolutionary gran'father would 'a' done in sech a case, an' I adopted his tick-tacks. I tackled Hopper, put him inter a harness o' ropes, put on his disguise as the parson, an' come hyar."

Just then there was a stir at the door, and other men appeared. One was an alert-looking man who hastened to shake hands with Ballard; it was Windsor, the detective.

Several prisoners were led into the room, and the foremost of them were Judge Whiting, Arlington and Van Tromp Stuyvesant Bliss. The genealogical investigator set up a dolorous complaint at sight of Central Pacific Paul.

"Oh! Mr. Ballard!" he cried, "won't you

help me? I am in a terrible state; I am unjustly suspected of being a criminal. Oh! won't you tell these men I am innocent?"

Mr. Bliss tried to wring his bound hands, but his downcast heart was relieved; Paul spoke the magic word, and he was released.

Windsor reported that the conquest of the village was complete. With the exception of a few who had managed to escape, all the wreckers were prisoners. Yank looked in vain for Ursula, and, failing to see her there, went to seek her.

"I want prompt settlement with these men," declared Ballard, sternly, as he indicated Whiting and Arlington. "I gave them one chance to take themselves off out of the way, but they came back—the law shall have them now."

Madam Pulaski had been talking earnestly with Hubert Vaughan. She now turned suddenly to the detective.

"They deserve punishment fully. They forced me to aid them by working upon my fears, having gained possession of my little child. Heaven knows I despise myself for the part I played, but my child was all I had."

Her voice faltered, but as Leonice clasped her arm around the speaker's waist, the silent sympathy and forgiveness cheered the sorrowful heart.

"Whiting's plot may be told in few words," Margaret resumed. "Leonice's father was very eccentric, and he kept her ignorant of the fact that he had valuable mining property in the West, but told the fact to the worst confidant he could have made—Whiting. Then the judge determined to marry Miss Ross to one of his boom companions, so that he could control her fortune, and he selected Arlington. No more need be said now, I think."

"You have said enough to prove what I knew before," returned Ballard; "that Whiting is a villain!"

"What of it?" defiantly asked Whiting. "No law can touch me for having wanted Leonice to marry."

"Are you sure?"

"I am."

"Then we will not argue that, but of one thing be sure: I will find some way by which the law can reach you. As for 'Blonde Pete' Arlington, there will be no doubt in his case."

"Give 'em all their desert!" advised Garrett Jeffreys, in a loud voice, "I'm in for a bad dose, an' I don't want no partiality shown. I only wish I could be revenged on those o' my own band who guarded the village so poor that this surprise took place."

He glared at his followers, but Central Pacific Paul, tiring of the scene, ordered all the captives removed to the prison. He was just in time, for Yank Yellowbird came in leading Ursula. She was agitated, and her eyes showed signs of weeping, but Nevermiss held to her hand and faced them all composedly.

"This is my ward," he announced, in a clear voice. "Here is a little woman who has helped me egregiously, an' I'd be false ter the Yellowbird pedigree ef I didn't stay by her for it. An' I will, too, fur she has won my affections, which is something mortal hard ter do. What with the newrolgy an' other malignant distempers, I've been shook ter pieces like hurley. I'm a plain old trumper o' mountain an' prairie, an' ain't got no home o' my own, but I know a good old man an' his wife who will be right glad ter take her in. It's the only thing ter be done, fur my gran'father, the Revolutionary relict, ain't alive now."

Ballard took Ursula's hand.

"I have heard who tried to liberate me from the prison, to-night," he said, "and I am truly grateful. You may rely upon me to aid you also, as far as possible."

Others came forward to say a pleasant word to the wrecker's daughter, and Ursula no longer shrunk away from Leonice. The danger of a step-mother was removed.

Mr. Van T. Stuyvesant Bliss addressed Yank in a low voice.

"Mr. Yellowbird, may I call your attention to a matter of urgent importance?"

"To be sure. Say on!"

"There is some mistake in my notes on your family history. On page thirty-seven I have it recorded that your father married Charity High, in 1813, and had seventeen children, while a few pages further on I have it that he married Deborah Blythe in 1816, and had nineteen children. I don't see—"

"'Twas my oldest brother married Deborah."

"What! in 1816?"

"Jes' so."

"But he would then be a mere babe. I don't understand."

"Don't see nothin' odd about it," quoth Yank. "He was brother ter my gran'father, my brother was, which explains it all. Now don't forget ag'in, fur the Yellowbird record must be kep' straight."

And the mountaineer walked away, leaving Mr. Bliss in dumfounded perplexity. Nevermiss saw Paul and Leonice, and Vaughan and Margaret, talking together, and he winked to Windsor and observed:

"I consait it'll all come out right!"

It did "all come out right."

All the valuables stolen from the train were recovered; Duke Griffin died of his wound; Jeffreys, Hopper and the other wreckers were tried and sentenced to prison; "Blonde Pete" received a long term in prison-walls for numerous crimes; and Whiting's record was found to be so bad that a little exertion put him in the same dilemma. Later, Jeffreys was shot dead while trying to escape, and Hopper served out his time, but Whiting and Arlington are still convicted.

Jake Blade made good his escape, while the Reverend Job Smithson accepted an invitation to leave for parts unknown.

Conductor Peters served a good many years on the Central Pacific, and Hobbs and his wife became owners of the hotel.

Van T. Stuyvesant Bliss returned East and began his great genealogical work, but the Yellowbirds will have no place in it. A careless chambermaid lighted the fire with the manuscript preserved by Bliss, and it was lost, greatly to that gentleman's grief.

To-day there is a prominent lawyer in a large Western town named Hubert Vaughan. His wife is named Margaret. With them are three children; one of which is Madam's daughter, while two boys call Vaughan "father."

Central Pacific Paul is a detective no longer. He secured Leonice's fortune for her, and it is now safe, for she is his wife.

Paul went with Yank and saw Ursula located with the mountaineer's aged friends. There they were sure that she would be kindly treated, and their opinion was verified. Nevermiss and his dog resumed their wandering life, but Yank found time to visit the wrecker's daughter now and then.

He always saw her improving, and knew she was becoming a fine woman; and he felt that he had done well when he decided that she was worthy of confidence.

THE END.

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